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A NOVEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF

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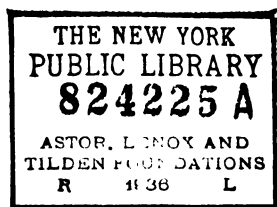
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NOTE

The title "Long Odds" under which this novel was published serially in Australia has been changed because another story with the same title has since been issued.

NOY VAN
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CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|--|------|
| I. DYM STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE | 1 |
| II. CARNIFEX | 12 |
| III. IN RE CYRIL CHATTERIS | 27 |
| IV. A WEDDING GIFT | 40 |
| V. FIRST LINKS | 46 |
| VI. MR. SEPTIMUS BLAND | 60 |
| VII. MAKING INQUIRIES. | 67 |
| VIII. MRS. MANTON "SEES HER WAY." | 74 |
| IX. AN AFTERNOON'S STROLL. | 79 |
| X. A QUIET DINNER IN BROOKE STREET. | 85 |
| XI. "JACTA EST ALEA" | 92 |
| XII. A RETREAT BEFORE HEAVY GUNS | 96 |
| XIII. CHECK, AND NO CHEQUE. | 104 |
| XIV. WAYS AND MEANS. | 111 |
| XV. A DOUBTFUL POSITION | 124 |
| XVI. DACRE PROVES "QUITE THE GENTLEMAN". | 130 |
| XVII. BOB THINKS ABOUT RETURNING TO AUSTRALIA. | 139 |
| XVIII. LIMING THE TWIG. | 151 |
| XIX. WIFE-TAMING. | 160 |
| XX. SELLING AND BORROWING. | 163 |
| XXI. THE CARDINAL | 169 |
| XXII. POLITICAL PLOTS. | 175 |

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| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XXIII. RUPERT DACRE IN A NEW RÔLE. | 182 |
| XXIV. AT MATCHAM. | 188 |
| XXV. PRINCIPALLY AMATORY. | 192 |
| XXVI. "BLESS YOU, MY CHILDREN!" | 198 |
| XXVII. PROSE AND POETRY | 203 |
| XXVIII. NEARING THE BRINK. | 211 |
| XXIX. DAVID AND JONATHAN. | 215 |
| XXX. THE MAJOR GETS A LITTLE "INFORMATION" . . . | 220 |
| XXXI. A LOSING GAME. | 228 |
| XXXII. "THERE IS A PROVIDENCE THAT SHAPES OUR ENDS" . | 234 |
| XXXIII. A DUET AND A SOLO | 237 |
| XXXIV. DRIVEN TO BAY. | 243 |
| XXXV. SPES ET PREMIA IN AMBIGUO. | 250 |
| XXXVI. BINNS TO THE RESCUE! | 255 |
| XXXVII. HEAD AGAINST HEART. | 259 |
| XXXVIII. FRIENDS IN COUNCIL. | 266 |
| XXXIX. A POLITICAL APOSTLE | 271 |
| XL. HUSBAND AND WIFE. | 276 |
| XLI. THE BEGINNING OF THE END | 282 |
| XLII. UNDER THE TORTURE | 287 |
| XLIII. THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM | 293 |
| XLIV. THE EARTHEN POT | 299 |
| XLV. THE BLOW FALLS | 306 |
| XLVI. IN THE BALANCE | 314 |
| XLVII. RETRIBUTION | 323 |
| XLVIII. LONG ODDS. | 333 |
| XLIX. THE CHESTER CUP | 338 |
| L. THE OTHER END OF THE CHAIN. | 343 |
| LI. HEART AGAINST HEAD | 351 |
| LII. NEMESIS | 359 |
| LIII. CERTA FUNERA ET LUCTUS | 363 |
| LIV. SMOKE | 372 |
| LV. FIVE YEARS AFTER. | 377 |

HEAVY ODDS.

CHAPTER I.

DYM STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

DYM STREET, Cavendish Square, was not a pleasant locality. No man with ten thousand a year, unless he was a misanthrope, a miser, or a political refugee, would willingly pitch his tent there.

In old days Dym Street had been a fashionable quarter. The long link-extinguishers, fastened over the rusty iron railings, attested that gay meetings had been held in those dreary old houses; that fair women had danced there; that Corydon, in a long skirted coat, had handed Phillis, in hoop and powder, to her sedan, amid a crowd of shouting link boys and pushing chairmen.

The glory had departed from it now. The tall houses still remained, but their dreary, dusty windows, and melancholy, sombre doors had desolation written in every pane and every panel. No well hung barouches stood at its doorsteps. No coachman, gorgeous in calves and wig, squared his fat arms and pulled up his foaming horses, to permit Lady Lavinia or Lady Florence to recount the triumphs of a drawing-room, or to seek repose after the fatigues of a ball. To be sure, Lord Ballyragbag's mansion was situated at one end of the street, but as his lordship was always either in Paris or Hombourg (his creditors allowed him £200 a year to keep out of the court) its presence did not confer much practical honour on the neighbourhood. Dr. Sangrado possessed a funereal looking establishment close at hand, an establishment termed by the doctor a "sanatorium," but which, with its black door

and stained brass plate, had the appearance of a huge coffin set up on end.

Mr. Lurcher Demas, the popular (condemnatory) preacher, lived in Dym Street, and preached sulphuric sermons in the wooden church next to the gin palace at the corner. The Hon. and Rev. Vere St. Simeon was presumed to live there too, but his duties calling him frequently to visit his uncle the Bishop and his father the Earl, the work of the parish—not a small one—was performed by Mr. Paul Rendelsham, a haggard and conscientious curate on £80 a year. Anthony Casteup, the banker, resided in Dym Street. A rich man was Anthony, but having gout in every place but his stomach, and being restricted by his doctors to half a snipe and a pint of champagne per diem, he did not impart much liveliness to the locality. Miss Lethbridge—a woman of vast wealth, it was reported—lived next door to the banker, and sent tender inquiries after his health by her apoplectic servant; inquiries which, I grieve to say, were responded to with ungrateful rumblings and groanings of a comminatory sort, by the inaccessible Anthony. A struggling barrister, with a family of fourteen, occupied a house over the way (it was all that was left to him out of a law suit, which had amused his family for thirty years); but his wife being delicate and the children given to infantile ailments, the knocker was eternally enveloped in kid, and the roadway covered with tan and straw, giving a casual passer-by the idea that the Great Plague had made a special settlement there, and that the dead-cart, “loud on the stone and low on the straw,” was momentarily expected.

Dym Street, it will be seen, therefore, was not a pleasant place. Its principal characteristic was melancholy; its principal articles of importation were babies; its principal industries were the eating of toffee and the dropping of shuttlecocks down areas. This last amusement was a favourite one with the infant inhabitants. The consumption of shuttlecocks was stupendous, and on a summer's morning the bottoms of areas would be covered with round pieces of moulting cork, leading a stranger to believe that some vast flight of birds had passed over London in the night, and had left the weak and weary behind them.

Dym Street had evidently commenced life like some gay young spendthrift: had fallen on evil days, and, after a desperate attempt to regain respectability, given up the idea in despair, and relapsed into utter destitution and Bohemianism. At the Oxford Street end it was well enough. 'Twas here where Ballyragbag's mansion reared its stately head. In the middle, it inclined to the military and sporting interest, having a barracks (or the back of one) and a "Mews" conspicuously placed. At the end, it ran into all sorts of extravagancies—cheap photographic saloons; confectioners (with fly spotted ices in painted deal always in the window); haberdashers in a chronic state of insolvency; and grocers with immense tea-pots (bearing "Try our pure teas, 6d.," conspicuously lettered on their sides), hung in Brobdignagian splendour from the upper storey. Signs of various trades abounded in the lower end of Dym Street. Boots, hats, coffee pots and gridirons, creaked in the blasts of November, and blistered in the suns of June. So many and so large were these monstrosities, that one might imagine that the Titans had taken lodgings in the west-end, and having had a family dispute, were flinging their household furniture out of the windows.

With the Bohemian end of Dym Street, however, we have little to do, and still less with the aristocratic quarter. It is the middle of the street that claims our attention.

Respectability is rampant in the middle. By respectability, I mean that respectability that goes to office at nine in a morning, is clean shaven and rosy gilled, is married and has children. These respectabilities were chiefly clerks in east-end government offices, clerks in merchants' houses, clerks to banking firms, clerks in that vague place the "city"—clerks who, as a rule, had incomes of £200 a year, who were slightly bald, wore creaking boots, and who supplemented their gains by the letting of portions of their houses to lodgers.

Dym Street middle, was a nest of lodging-houses—some good, some bad, some indifferent, but all, as far as outward appearances went, respectable to freezing point. It must not be imagined however, that the keepers of them were all clerks. No, some were widows. Your London lodging-house keeper is invariably a clerk or a widow; and, when

Mr. Cyril Chatteris answered an advertisement in the *Times*, by driving up in a four-wheeled cab, loaded with luggage, to 75 Dym Street, the door was opened by a widow.

Mrs. Anastasia Manton was no common woman. She was tall, robust, and nobly built. Her detractors said that her form inclined to the Dutch galliot build, but that was a calumny. She was the widow—so she asserted—of a departed coal merchant, who, dying in the odour of sanctity and the arms of his spouse, left her £2000 in the three per cents., and a small, brown-eyed daughter.

Deprived of the protecting arm of her departed coal merchant, Mrs. Manton did not quail. She went instantly into widow's weeds and furnished lodgings, determined to husband her resources. From all that Mr. Cyril Chatteris was able to learn, Mrs. Manton had no friends; but, by dint of economy and perseverance, she succeeded in saving enough money to rent a furnished house in Dym Street ("within easy distance of the parks and places of amusement"), and to make a very snug living out of the lodgers she "did for."

The house was, perhaps, not lively, but it was cheap; and Mr. Cyril Chatteris, being somewhat slender in purse, was satisfied to live in the "parlours," and to be waited on by Miss Caroline Manton, the brown-eyed daughter of his landlady.

Mr. Cyril Chatteris was a young man, with the ostensible profession of a barrister, but who had no chambers and no briefs, and very few friends. He seldom went out, and was occupied in reading and smoking a great portion of the day, and in smoking and reading a great portion of the night. In a word, Mr. Cyril Chatteris was a studious young fellow; so, at least, Mrs. Manton said; and a very quiet young fellow, so the other lodgers said; and rather a handsome young fellow, so Miss Caroline said.

Caroline Manton was a pretty girl. Not the sort of girl that you would call pretty if you met her at a ball, but that you would instantly discover and flirt with at a picnic or a croquet party. A girl who looked as if she was capable of doing something besides simpering and playing new music in tolerable time at sight. She was slight, with a good figure, plenty of wavy brown hair, and

large brown eyes. There was not much to attract the admirer of muscular beauty, but the brown eyes had a fire in them, and the delicate little nose a piquancy about it, and the brown hair a tendency to break loose and tumble down in soft masses, that was tantalizing and fascinating enough. Miss Caroline Manton had very white hands, very pretty feet, and could talk to a sensible man for ten minutes without either looking foolish, trying to flirt, or talking nonsense.

It may be a matter of wonder to the reader that the daughter of a lodging-house keeper should possess these attractions—the white hands especially. It must be remembered, however, that Mrs. Manton was no common woman, and that she brought up her daughter in no common way. Miss Caroline could sing a little. Old Papatacci, who occupied the drawing-room floor, said that she would sing “peautiful von of these days,” and though her mother permitted her to take up tea-trays, and to chat for five minutes or so with the lodgers, she never allowed “her Carry” to soil her pretty hands with housework. It is doubtful indeed if Miss Caroline would have submitted to such drudgery had her mother commanded it. For she was not unread in the fascinating pages of the “London Journal,” and had heard how pretty girls of humble birth were constantly being selected by the aristocracy as wives. Did not Mildred Mainwaring marry a Duke? and was not poor Lucy the Lone One rewarded for her perils (chiefly in the balcony descending and “Ha,-maiden,-you-must-be-mine!” line of business) by the hand of the Earl of Elsinore, and a dowry (given by Sir Rupert de Burgh) of £50,000 on her wedding-day? Now, Caroline had compared faces with Mildred Mainwaring, and had come to the conclusion that her own looking-glass reflected the prettier woman of the two, and she was convinced that she only wanted the chance to marry a duke in twenty-four hours. When a young lady, aged seventeen, is convinced of her own powers of fascination, and has courage enough to use them, she becomes a dangerous rock ahead to the numberless craft that cruise hither and thither in that social sea whose shore is Matrimony. Men are usually prepared for coquetries in a

woman, but when a little slip of a girl appears they unbuckle their armour of proof, and ten to one get a sly shaft sent home up to the feather.

When Mr. Cyril Chatteris first arrived in Dym Street, I am convinced he had no intention of making love to his landlady's daughter; but as time wore on, and the silvery laugh, the elegant figure, the pretty *minauderies*, and the artful artlessness of Miss Carry became more marked, he began to watch for her coming, to make excuses for keeping her waiting, and to venture upon casual and offhand inquiries as to where she had been, and what she had been doing during the day. In proportion as the girl saw her success, the more did she force on the attack, until at last, the lodger began to ask himself seriously if this state of things could continue.

"I cannot marry the girl!" said Cyril, as he contemplated his slippers through a cloud of tobacco-smoke after breakfast. "She would—and Kate too—pshaw—the thing is impossible!" and he fell to thinking.

"Moreover, how to keep her? I have no money, and that old—" he stopped suddenly. "It's madness to dream of it. Here am I, without a sixpence beyond a beggarly allowance of two hundred a year, and no hope of getting more. A quarrel with my father and mother. Oh, confound it, it's preposterous!" he cried, starting up,—
"fall in love with my landlady's daughter! Why, it would kill old Lady Loughborough if she even dreamt it."

And the "Parlours" fell to walking up and down, biting his nails, gnawing his moustache, and smoking violently.

Mrs. Manton was not ignorant of her lodger's predilection for her daughter. Madam Manton was a woman of remarkable diplomatic ability. As she frequently remarked over her evening tea, "She could see as far through a millstone as most people;" and her researches among her lodger's linen, and her inspection of his gold-topped dressing-case, had led her to the belief that he was of a different stamp to the usual class of Dym Street lodgers. Though Mr. Cyril Chatteris wore a tweed shooting-coat, was given to smoking cavendish tobacco, and eschewed cigars, there was an air about him which forbade the suspicion that he was of the Bohemian sort.

"Briefless barristers don't have diamond studs, and six dozen shirts to their backs, as I knows on," would Mrs. Manton say; "and it's my opinion that Mr. Chatteris needn't live in Dym Street unless he liked. Oh, don't tell me, Carry. He's got a 'h'air' about him, he has; and if he's a making love to you, you'd better take care what you're about. *He* ain't a fool like young Binns, the 'Parlours' ain't."

At which Carry would blush and laugh. To speak truth, the young lady was more than willing to meet any advances that the "Parlours" might choose to make, half-way. Cyril Chatteris was a handsome fellow. He was of the middle height, with good grey eyes, and sound white teeth. Perhaps his grey eyes had a shifting, uneasy look about them, that made you imagine that they were not too trustworthy; and his mouth would have been cruel had it not been for the brown moustache that covered it so gracefully. But his youth was in his favour. His chin was the worst part of his face; it was the chin of a vacillating, vain, yet reckless man, who might have the courage to commit a crime, but not the courage to face the consequences. Taking him all in all though, Cyril Chatteris was well enough: he was better looking than most men one meets, and he had a certain amount of sarcastic cleverness and superficial brilliancy that made him an amusing companion and an agreeable fellow. Miss Caroline mentally likened him to Sir Felix Fakeaway, the wicked, clever, dashing baronet, in the last story in her penny journal, and was enraptured with his non-chalant ways, his spotless wristbands, and his brown moustache.

It seemed that it would not take much urging to make her as much in love with him as her mother would wish her to be; and as for "taking care of what she was about," that was an easy thing to the student of "Mildred Mainwaring."

Chatteris himself had, I am bound to say, no designs upon the girl. He might have had them at first, but her artful innocence rendered him powerless. He was only twenty-two, and had never laid siege to the heart of a woman like his landlady's daughter.

In point of fact, she was too clever for him. With her mother to back her, this little minx of seventeen would have been a match for a more experienced lady-killer than Mr. Cyril Chatteris. In vain he laughed at her, talked at her, made eyes at her, and chatted with her over the teacups. She was impervious.

The pursuit commenced in jest, was continued in earnest, and at last the lodger began to get very uneasy about the little coquette that showed herself for ten minutes or so every day, and would not hear the voice of the charmer, let him charm never so wisely.

"That booby Binns" that Mrs. Manton spoke of, was also a thorn in the side of the love-sick lodger. Binns was a grocer's apprentice and sucking partner. He was a scorbutic youth, with a chin tuft and a pretended sarcasm about his face that was irresistibly ludicrous. He was given to reading poetry, was Binns, and could quote Tennyson and Byron by the yard. This ingenuous youth had been smitten by the charms of Carry at a trade ball in the neighbourhood. After much tribulation, he had obtained an introduction to the mother, and was tacitly admitted as suitor to Miss Manton.

On Sundays Binns would appear at the door, radiant in blue necktie, black clothes, green gloves, and Blucher boots. To him would issue Carry, looking bewitchingly pretty, and with the merest glance in the world at the parlour window where Mr. Chatteris was breakfasting, would trip off to church.

At first the elegant lodger laughed at the Binnian flirtation, then he was annoyed to think that Carry should be seen in company with such a "howling cad as that young brute;" then he considered the existence of Binns as a special insult to himself, and lastly, he determined, "if ever he met her with the little wretch, to twist his miserable neck."

Binns had much the same feeling with regard to Mr. Cyril Chatteris. With the instinctive jealousy of a boy, he had picked out the lodger as a rival to his hopes, and though he had seldom seen him, and never spoken to him, he hated him with mortal hatred. Binns, like most foolish boys who are educated above their station, was a

"Red-hot Radical, sir." He would talk for hours about the aristocracy, the rights of the MAN (in terrific vocal capitals); and had a general desire for the blood of all who looked down upon Binns. One day he ventured to ventilate these views to Carry, who, being in bad temper, retaliated with such cutting severity, that the poor little fellow cried over "Locksley Hall" that night in bed, and looked at his solitary, and as yet virgin, razor with dreadful emphasis.

One night this scorbutic boy had escorted Carry home from a "tea drinking" at Mrs. Mack's (a fellow lodging-house keeper), and was convoying his charge up the street, when he was descried by Mr. Cyril Chatteris, who had been dining somewhat freely at the "Wellington." Hastening his steps, the lodger overtook them.

"Good evening, Carry," says he, raising his hat, and persistently overlooking the indignant Binns.

"Good evening, Mr. Chatteris," returned the blushing Carry.

"Allow me to have the honour of escorting you home," says Cyril, taking the hand she had extended to him, and drawing it under his arm.

"And, p—p—pray, sir, who may you be?" cries the slighted Binns, every pimple on his face glowing with love, pride, and indignation.

"You had better let the boy go home, Carry," said the composed Cyril.

"The boy!" and "Carry!" Could this be borne? All his red-hot Radicalism cried out against it; and, with desperate intent, the enraged, despised, and vengeful Binns planted a blow fair upon the brown moustache of his aristocratic rival.

"Oh! Cyril, Cyril, pray take care!" screams Carry, her long-guarded secret slipping out.

"Don't be afraid, my darling, I won't hurt the little fool!" was the reply; and Chatteris, catching the youth by the collar of his best coat, boxed his ears until his arms ached.

This was terrible. To be thrashed, Binns did not mind so much. He would have fought the lover of his mistress with any weapon that could be named. He would have

died in her defence without a murmur; but to have his ears boxed! As he got slowly up from off the pavement—his ears tingling, his head swimming, his blue necktie disarranged, his shirt buttons torn off, and his best black coat ruined for ever, despised love, furious hate, and all the passions of Collins's ode surging up in his heart—his red-hot Radicalism dissolved in a flood of tears.

It is not a pleasant spectacle, that of a "red-hot Radical," nineteen years of age, blubbering over the loss of a girl who only used him as a stalking horse for other game; so we will drop the curtain for the present upon Mr. Robert Binns.

I cannot say that Mr. Cyril Chatteris was perfectly unmoved during the encounter. If the truth were told, I think that, in his heart of hearts, he was slightly afraid of his adversary. Bone and muscle are not to be despised, even though they belong to a grocer's apprentice; and I am not sure whether, had the combat been prolonged, the plebeian would not have soundly thrashed the patrician, despite all the presumed blue blood in his veins. But the attack was too sudden. It was a triumph of mind over matter, and Cyril felt elated at the result of his brief engagement, and began to regret that he had used such severe chastisement. Now that the contest was over, and she had her lover safely by her side, perhaps Carry felt some pity too, for she said, after some minutes' silence,

"I hope you did not hurt him much, Mr. Chatteris."

"I! No!" says Cyril, pluming himself upon his displayed powers. "He'll be all right in ten minutes." Then, with a touch of the old envy, "You seem to take great interest in the lout."

"No, Mr. Chatteris," says Carry, "I don't; but—"

"Can't you call me Cyril? you did just now."

Silence and blushes on the part of Carry. Cyril felt that he must say something. They were close to the Mantonian door.

"Carry, you must have seen that I love you!"

Carry's heart gave a great bound. At last! The prince had come, and she should ride away with him.

"Oh! Mr. Chatteris!"

"Do you not love me, my darling?"

"I am afraid I do, Cyril, very much," was the reply, given in a tone as innocent as Eve's before the fall; though, even as the words left her lips, Carry was thinking of dresses and diamonds, and whether her mother would live with her when she was married.

When Mrs. Manton opened the door (the "slavey" had gone to fetch beer for the refectation of the two ladies) she was somewhat surprised to see the slight figure of her elegant lodger, instead of the stumpy, sturdy one of the faithful Binns; but upon Carry, half weeping, half laughing, falling into her arms, she understood it all.

"He has proposed for her, then," thought Mrs. Anastasia Manton. Then, aloud, "God bless you, sir. You've got a treasure in Carry. Come to her mother, then, my lovey!"

Chatteris turned into his parlour somewhat hastily; but, with all a mother-in-law's instinctive tyranny, Mrs. Manton followed and embraced him emphatically, crying,

"God bless you, Cyril, my boy! God bless you!"

The accepted suitor was hardly prepared for this. The daughter he really loved—for the moment, at all events—but the old, vulgar, false-fronted, false-toothed mother—Faugh! He could not stand *her*, he said mentally; and Mrs. Manton making preparations to faint upon the sofa, received such an undeniable scowl from her future son-in-law, that she changed her mind, and went downstairs instead.

I cannot relate with what female chit-chat and plans for future aggrandisement the mother and daughter beguiled the night away. I know, however, that Mr. Cyril Chatteris did not sleep soundly.

"I have done it, by Jove," said he, "and I must make the best of it."

He thought much how to make the best of it. What would his father say?

"Not that it matters much now," says Cyril to himself, over his fifth pipe. "He doesn't care whom I marry. But I must tell him, I suppose. Yet I don't know. He might turn round again perhaps. Shall I marry her boldly, and take her to Matcham? What could she do among those old women? A dove in a hawk's nest. And Kate

too!" here his brow contracted, "I suppose Kate would love her like a sister—oh, of course!" and he laughed, "and my dear brother Fred, with his dandified airs! He wouldn't tell stories at mess about her, would he? No—well, I don't think he would. Fred isn't a bad fellow. He offered to make it all right with the governor if I'd only—but no, hang it, I've done with all that," and he rose and paced the carpet.

"It's her education that is the thing. How would she look beside Kate with her music and her drawing, and her 'ologies' and 'enics?' She couldn't preside at the table at Matcham—she'd kill old Lady Loughborough! There's no help for it now, however. I must write and tell my father."

He wrote five letters, and spoilt them all. One began "My dear Carry," instead of "My dear father," and one he directed "Saville Manton," instead of "Saville Chatteris." After the fifth error he threw down the pen.

"I won't write until I am married, at all events," said he, and went to bed.

CHAPTER II.

CARNIFEX.

"CARNIFEX against the Boko mare for a thousand!" exclaimed Fred Chatteris, lieutenant in Her Majesty's—Light Dragoons, now quartered at the garrison (and cathedral) town of Kirkminster. "I'll lay a thousand on Carnifex, Ponsonby!" The speaker was a young man of five-and-twenty, and he was sitting at the open window of the mess-room looking on to the paved square of Kirkminster barracks.

The owner of the "Boko mare" was a sturdy, red-faced man, of middle age, whose face was tanned and reddened by all sorts of weather and liquor. Jack Ponsonby—or, to speak by the card, the Hon. John Ponsonby—was a younger son of the Earl of Desborough, and came of a sporting family. The Ponsonbys were renowned for their

turf achievements, and the Hon. John had not hitherto belied his race. His sturdy little legs, red, good-humoured countenance, bushy whiskers, and clear blue eyes, were known at most race meetings and hunting counties in England. He was accounted "the hardest rider in the Shires"—no mean fame—and there were few "sporting men" who would like to try weight of metal with the Major of the —th.

"I'll take you, Fred, old fellow!" he cried out. "I believe in that little mare." As soon as the old hound had given tongue the pack took up the cry.

"I'm in with you, Major!"

"Done with you, Chatteris!"

"I don't mind a mild fifty!"

"Five to three in ponies!"

"Don't be so fast, my friends," says the owner of Carnifex (he was languid in his manner, and given to drawling and clipping his words), "I won't ride unless there's a field!"

"That's easily got," said Haughton, pulling his moustache.

"The regiment is like a training stables."

"I'll put in Jemmy Jessamy, if you won't over-weight him," says little Toodles (he was the son of a distinguished drysalter in the city).

"Catch weights, of course," responded the Major, taking out his red betting-book, and calmly booking his bets.

"And Smasher can go too!" said Tom Hethrington, who proverbially rode the worst tempered horses in England. "He's taken to eating his groom, and wants exercise!"

"By Jove!" cries the Major, "we'll make a field-day of it. All the 'fank and rashion' of Kirkminster. Of course, all your people will come from Matcham, Chatteris?"

Fred Chatteris nodded, and proceeded to note up the field of horses.

"Where shall we have the course?" said he.

"There's a good line by the race-course. Start from the Four-acre Field at Dingley, across the turf to Chalker's Gap, then over the ploughed land, by Patchley Brook, jump the timber fence into the course, then home up the straight, and finish at the stand. Lots of stiff hurdles,

a good big water jump, and plenty of stout timber," returned the "hardest, etc.," with glee.

"As you please," said Fred, carelessly. "Carnifex is a glutton at timber."

"Are we to have three weeks?" asked Toodles.

"Oh, no, run the thing to-morrow!" cries Hethrington, who was anxious about his man-eater.

"Impossible!"

"Well, Monday then."

"If you fellows are agreeable, I'll run on Wednesday," says the Major.

"Wednesday, by all means," drawled Fred Chatteris, "and we'll all ride our own horses."

* * * * *

Kirkminster was all agog at the news of the steeplechase. There were races once a year—"The Kirkminster Handicap," when the cracks came down, and no little money changed hands.

The garrison races, too, took place in the autumn, and perhaps caused more real fun than the "legitimate business," as the Major called it, for Kirkminster was not much given to sporting. Sir Valentine Yoicks' hounds met three times a week at Great Ringston or thereabouts, and were sturdily followed by the garrison and the farmers. Loamshire was not a good hunting country, and had it not been for the garrison, I doubt if even Sir Val's pack would have flourished. Sir Valentine Yoicks was a jovial fellow. He drank good wine, rode good horses, and gave liberally to charities. His nephew, Robert Calverly, or, as he was called, "young Squire Calverly," was a nephew worthy his uncle. He was not too intellectual either, but, as his friends declared, "his heart was in the right place, and he rode as straight as a crow." He was a tall, sunburnt, English-looking fellow too, and an immense favourite with all his lady friends. He was as playfully kind as a young elephant, was Bob Calverly, and would waltz (in utter disregard of time or tune) for hours with the plainest girl in the room, if he thought he would please her by so doing.

I fear, though, that the young squire was not fully at

home in ladies' society. He felt shy, awkward, and ill at ease, when some of the London belles who visited at Matcham attacked him after dinner. He could sing a good song among his friends, but was utterly ignorant of the respective merits of Verdi and Gounod. He never read sensation novels, and was not as well "up" in the Roman question as could be wished. He did not know Millais from Tenniel: but he could pick you out any bullock in a herd—ay, and remember him too. He was not a good hand at croquet playing, but he could shear one hundred sheep a day, and shear them clean, which is a matter of difficulty, I can tell you. He had no taste for water-colour drawings; but he could sit a buckjumper, and drive four horses down a sidling in a Gipps Land range with any man in Australia.

In point of fact, "Squire Calverly" was not Squire Calverly at all. He was born in Australia, and had come to England to visit his uncle, old Yoicks, of the Hall, and to see a little English life before he went back again.

When Valentine Yoicks was twenty-two, his sister married a farmer on her brother's estate. Yoicks *père*, who was alive at that time, was highly indignant at this; and, considering the honour of the Yoicks family sullied by the alliance, made the place so hot for poor Calverly, that the honest yeoman used to declare, almost with tears in his eyes, "He's a bitter, hard man, the squire is; but maybe it'll come back to him again."

It never did "come back" though, for Sir Percival Yoicks died with great complacency at the age of seventy-two, and was buried with exceeding pomp and glory in the family vault at Ringston.

Calverly went to Australia, and, after some exceedingly rough living, invested his capital in stock, and (like many another brave fellow before him) hewed a fortune out of the Australian bush.

With him, however, it concerns us not now. He was wealthy and respected, had a fine house, and was a power in the State. His sterling good sense had stood him in lieu of more brilliant qualities; and "old Calverly" was as well known in Melbourne and Sydney for an honest man and a warm friend, as his late father-in-law had

been in Loamshire for a crusty, hard-riding, godless old reprobate.

Sir Valentine had always liked his brother-in-law, and when a letter came from Australia, stating that Mr. Bob Calverly (with a draft for £3000 in his writing-case) was *en route* for England, Sir Val opened his heart and doors right willingly.

Robert Calverly had been home for about six months, and as yet had had no cause to complain. He was welcome everywhere. At the barracks, at the county houses, and at the cottages. He was "hail fellow well met," with everybody. The Major slapped Bob's brawny back, and vowed he was a "flyer all over." Mr. Frederick Chatteris used to say that he liked "that Australian fellow, he was such a good-natured cub." The young ladies in Kirkminster declared that he was a "dear good fellow, and had such nice brown eyes;" while the old ones whispered that he was rich beyond measure, and "a most desirable match for Fanny" or Laura, or Jenny, as the case might be.

But Mr. Bob Calverly, late of Ballara Plains, now of the Hall, Loamshire, was not to be caught easily. He had in good truth a slight *tendresse* already. One day Fred Chatteris drove the young Australian over to his father's at Matcham. Matcham Park was the finest in Loamshire; Saville Chatteris, Esquire, whilom *chargé d'affaires* at Krummelhoff, the proudest old diplomat that ever represented the policy of England; and his sister, Lady Loughborough, the most enchanting *mauvaise langue* in Europe.

Young Calverly, however, did not appreciate these things. He thought the Park small, Saville Chatteris an oily old humbug, and Lady Loughborough a scandalous old woman. So much for the effects of English civilization on an Australian. But an Australian can appreciate beauty of another kind as well as any man I know, and when the door opened after luncheon, and Miss Kate Ffrench walked in, and greeting her cousin with a mock curtsy, extended to the new-comer a small firm hand, saying—"Mr. Calverly, I suppose; how do you do? I have heard a great deal about you,"—our Australian blushed to the tips of his

sunburnt ears, and thought he had met the "queen of gods and men" face to face.

Kate Ffrench was the daughter of Laura Chatteris and "Mad Dick Ffrench of the Blues." Dick Ffrench, who, of course, could not do anything like anybody else, must needs run away with Miss Laura from Madame Aramarthe Lacajole's academy, and marry her by stealth. Had he asked permission, he could have married her in St. George's, Hanover Square, with twenty bridesmaids, in broad noon-day, for Dick Ffrench was a rich man then; but he took some foolish idea into his handsome bullet-head concerning the displeasure of Laura's family, and made a runaway match of it. One of the consequences of this rash act was, that Miss Laura's father, being at that time Secretary to the Waste-Paper Department of the F. O., and owner of Matcham, considered himself personally insulted, and refused to see his daughter again.

Captain Richard Ffrench being in the habit of spending about seven times his income, and borrowing at any rate of interest, speedily came to grief, and exchanging with curious rapidity into the Line, went out to India, and was shot there. His widow coming home again, and dying in a plaintive but noiseless manner in a little lodging-house, near Kennington Common, the stern parent relented, and adopting little Kate—then four years old—sent her down to Matcham, where she had lived ever since. It was to this young lady (seventeen now, and straight as an arrow) that Bob Calverly had lost his heart.

When Fred told him about the forthcoming steeplechase, he felt an inward twinge of regret that he had not a horse to enter, for if he prided himself upon anything in particular, it was his horsemanship.

"I wish I had known before about it," said he, "I would have put 'Stockrider' into it."

"Stockrider" was a colt that Bob had bought in Kirkminster and named, it would seem, in fond remembrance of past times at Ballara.

"Oh, it's all right," says the nonchalant Fred. "I'll speak to the Major about it. If you want to go in you can, of course, but it comes off to-morrow, you know."

"'Stockrider' is as hard as a nut," says Bob, with a pardonable colonialism. "I'll run him."

"Just as you like, my boy!" says Fred, admiring his boots. "Half-past one to-morrow is the time, you know, and we start from the Four-acre Field at Dingley."

At half-past one on the morrow, all Kirkminster was in commotion. There was to be a ball in the evening, and the hearts of the female population were fluttering at the prospect of gold shell epaulettes, ices, champagne, and flirtation. The course was crowded. It had been whispered that heavy bets were on, and that Mr. Chatteris stood to win or lose heavily. The regiment were all in it. Everybody that had a horse worthy the name had entered him, and even little Toodles had elected to ride his long-legged weedy screw, "Jemmy Jessamy." The Four-acre Field was full of the sporting world of Kirkminster.

Tom Yellowley, the hunting publican, was there, so was Jack Harris, horse doctor and coper (Jack wrote R.V.C.S. after his name, and was as big a scoundrel as any wearing spurs); Larry O'Snaffle, the sporting doctor, mounted on his trim little grey cob, was ready for the fray; Cleaver, the butcher, scanned the horses with a knowing eye, and hearing that the "Major" rode, instantly put a five-pound note upon "Ladybird, by Chanticleer, out of a Boko mare," as the stud-book called her.

While the horses are saddling, let us take a look round the course.

In the flat, numberless blue coats moved to and fro, and with them the bright ribbons of the pottery girls, who turned out in great force to see the "sogers ride." The little brush-covered booths were doing a good trade. Sergeant Overalls tossed off his pot with Trooper Collarpoint, and wished "good luck" to the Major. Corporal Bridoon walked up and down the course, offering "pots of heavy" on the success of Carnifex, and making unpleasant though guarded remarks upon the method in which Cornet Toodles managed his steed. The rustics were standing about in little knots and staring, open-mouthed, at the swaggering moustached dragoons; while such happy fellows as could claim acquaintance with a trooper, paraded, arm in arm, with him, and "stood" unlimited beer for his delectation.

The course ran as we have stated. The last jump was a stiff post-and-rail fence about half-way down the straight running, and a little further on, a temporary grand-stand had been erected, and there the "fank and rashion" of Kirkminster (as the Major termed them) were collected.

It was a pretty sight enough. The rich autumn tints of the trees gave colour to the landscape, the brilliant flags that marked the course waved gaily in the light breeze, and the sun shone brightly down upon the moving motley crowd.

The stand was not much patronised, at least by the magnates of the land. These preferred the privacy of their carriages. The two fat greys of Sir Thomas Blunderbore of the Beeches stood stolidly in front of the heavy chariot wherein the Blunderborian family (a mother and two unusually ugly daughters) reclined. The Rev. Horace Markham, the foxhunting rector, reined up his blood-mare to chat with Mrs. Eversley, the pretty widow of a late squire of his acquaintance. The Champignons of Kirkminster came out with overpowering splendour. Adelaide Champignon (rising thirty-three and somewhat faded) wearing a bonnet that seemed intended for a microscopic slide, so small was it, and Augustus, the only son of the family, carrying collars and scarf of such portentous dimensions that he looked like a perambulating Niagara of silk and linen.

The non-riding portion of the —th occupied a huge drag, the front seat of which was filled by no less a person than the Colonel himself. Black Brentwood, of the —th, was a man of note. His life, if written, would have made the admirer of sensation novels stare. Men told more stories of Black Brentwood than of any other man in the British army. His name was mixed up with nearly every scandal of the clubs, but he still held his head erect, and walked bravely in noonday. His fame at the War Office was notorious; but it is said that the chief himself, on being asked by some eager reformer to amend the error of Brentwood's ways, replied, "Sir, the Colonel of the —th is a *soldier*. Good morning!"

He looks quiet enough now though, as he leans over the high seat talking in subdued tones to Rupert Dacre of

the Foreign Office, who being on a visit to Matcham has come over to see the race.

As Mr. Rupert Dacre plays a somewhat prominent part in the history which follows, I will tell you all I know about him.

Rupert Dacre is the only son of Harcourt Dacre, late Secretary for Colonial Affairs. Harcourt Dacre was a self-made man; that is to say, he went into Parliament at an early age, and fought his way by sheer hard work, not unmingled with a little judicious humbug, to the upper ranks of political life. It was said of him that he never forgot a friend, or made an enemy. Clever, careful, and well versed in all the sterner details of red-tapeism, he made a position for himself, and died comparatively wealthy, and reasonably famous. His son followed in his footsteps. Rupert Dacre was essentially a man of his age. Cool, quiet, sarcastic, and prudent; he had marked out a course for himself, and steadily pursued it. The authorities believed in Rupert Dacre. He never blundered, and had a happy knack of turning the errors of others to account. Morally, he was without principle, but socially and politically he was a "safe" man. No *esclandre* had ever happened to the cautious Rupert. Without being a whit better than his fellows, he had the prudence to conceal his vices, and acting always upon the broad principle of being "all things to all men" (especially to those in power), he bore the reputation of a man of talent. Connected—by report at all events—with the leading journals of the day, he was to a certain extent a power in his own world. He was just brilliant enough to please, just sarcastic enough to be feared, and just rich enough not to be envied. He never said the wrong thing in the wrong place, or did the right thing at the wrong time. His personal appearance was in his favour. He had just escaped being handsome, and, save for a pair of bright sharp eyes, you could not point to any particularly distinctive feature in his face. He was the essence of refined commonplace, an artist's proof of the ordinary modern Englishman. Too clever to be a cipher, and too cautious to be eccentric, he was outwardly the impersonation of mediocrity; and it was only after you had talked with him that you found out he was no common specimen of his class. He was a looking-

glass to every man's opinions, and every clever man deemed himself the first to discover and appreciate his talents. If asked to name the two cleverest men of the day, each diplomatist would—if speaking honestly—have said “myself and Rupert Dacre.” He kept his claws sheathed, in order that he might strike the more securely. He did not hide his talent in a napkin; he lodged it safely, in order that it might bear interest a hundred-fold.

Saville Chatteris was one of Rupert's many irons, and he had come to Matcham to keep him as hot as possible.

With this view he strolled over to the Matcham barouche. Saville Chatteris was in a more affable mood than usual. His eldest and favourite son was to ride the finest horse on the ground, and had every prospect of winning. Vanity being a weak point in the ex-diplomat's character, he was pleased at this, and looked forward, with subdued delight, to the reflected honour which would fall upon him as the father of the hero of the day. He was standing up in the barouche with race-glass directed to the white spot that marked the starting post.

“They're getting ready, Kate!” said he.

“Can you see Fred, uncle?”

“No—yes—I think I can. Orange and black, isn't he?”

“What is it, aunty? You have the card.”

Lady Loughborough, who was leaning back in aristocratic beatitude, languidly lifted her double-rimmed gold eyeglass to her aged nose, and perused the “c'rect card” (issued by the Major in the fulness of his heart), supplied by the ragged Kirkminster Bedouin a few minutes before.

“I can't find it, child,” said she, pettishly, at length.

“Permit me! Ah! *Lieutenant Frederick Chatteris, orange and black.*”

It was Rupert who spoke.

“Oh! Mr. Dacre, you have found your way here again!”

“Yes. I have undergone the social penalty of having friends, and have said all the agreeable things I could invent on short notice. There is a large assemblage;” and he looked round carelessly.

Lady Loughborough shrugged her shoulders.

“Yes, everybody seems to be here. I saw the banker's people just now, with a hamper behind the carriage.

There are the Champignons, too. I cannot think of whom that eldest girl reminds me."

"She is not unlike Miss Mentrivee, the novelist," says Dacre, putting up his eyeglass.

"Oh! that terrible woman I met at a *conversazione* last season." And Lady Loughborough made a little *moue*. "She talked geology all the time."

"She is considered a handsome girl, though."

"Do you think so?"

"No, I don't think so. Her face is as highly-coloured as her novels; and both display the same amount of artistic skill."

"Fie!" said Lady Loughborough, with a pleased smile.

Dacre had made his point, and was too good an actor not to make his exit while his audience was in good humour. He turned to Kate.

"May I lose a pair of gloves, Miss Ffrench?"

"Twenty pairs if you like," returned Kate, who did not admire him.

"You back Carnifex, of course?"

"The honour of the house, you know."

"I am afraid you will lose," said he. "Ladybird was a good goer when I sold her to Cy——"

He stopped suddenly, as if he had suddenly entered on forbidden ground, and eyed the girl narrowly.

Kate had flushed crimson from neck to forehead, and the little hand that rested on the iron rail of the box clenched itself involuntarily. Her eyes turned towards Mr. Saville Chatteris, who was still gazing intently into the distance.

Rupert dropped his voice.

"Pardon me, I had forgotten."

Kate did not speak. There was a murmur around.

"They're off!" cried the master of Matcham, and handed his glass to his niece.

They were off in good sooth—the usual steeplechase start. The dapper little man who acted as starter dropped his flag. Ladybird, held in the light but firm grasp of the "hardest rider in the shires," sailed away with a lead. Carnifex, with a leer of his vicious eye, a shake of his vicious head, and a plunge that tried the arms of Fred

Chatteris, dashed off in his wake. The "man-eater," who had been taking suspicious backward sniffs at the gallant captain's boots, at last consented to go, and Hethrington laid himself along little Toodles, determined to cut *him* down at all events.

Poor Toodles was a picture. "Jemmy Jessamy" was making terrific play. Lashing out his long legs, whisking his long tail, and boring down with his huge head, he was causing the drysalter's son to fly up out of the pigskin every three seconds.

"What shall I do at the fence?" asked Toodles, mentally. "What a fool I am!"

Haughton and his gallant little grey were going steadily on the right, while Bob Calverly—his knees too high for elegance, but with his hands well down and his body well back—forced Stockrider out of the ruck with a wisdom beyond his years. Behind, came the fag end of the field, whipping and spurring to make up for lost time; while—there being no clerk of the course, or other judicious official—the whole of sporting Kirkminster was maddening in the rear.

Tom Yellowley and Jack Harris hurried their spavined horses along, shouting for their respective favourites; and Dr. O'Snaffle, with a sharp look around him, gave the little cob his head, and shot off like an arrow.

A bit of grass land led up to the first fence, giving the horses an opportunity of getting well into their stride. At it they came, Ladybird slipping over like water; and Jemmy Jessamy, to Toodles's great surprise, taking the bit in his teeth, cleared the four-foot rail with a bound that effectually disposed of his wind for the remainder of the day. Carnifex was, as Fred termed him, "a glutton at timber," and he nearly took the fence in his stride. The rest followed safely, for the man-eater, crashing bodily through the rails, had nearly fractured Hethrington's kneecap, and made room enough for a squadron. They were all well down to their work by this time, the Major leading, Haughton creeping up on the grey with calm disregard of everybody. Toodles felt his heart sink as they came to the next jump. It was a terrific hedge and ditch—so big a ditch that it was called in the rustic ver-

nacular "Chalker's Gap"—(Chalker being a defunct farmer, who perished there one fine hunting morning). At Chalker's Gap, then, the knowing ones were stationed.

"This'll show 'em up," said Cleaver, the butcher, as he rested his chin on his ugly hunting crop. "Bravo—good!" he suddenly cried.

Ladybird cleared it beautifully, but, with a cruel cut of the whip, Fred laid Carnifex alongside, and as Jack Ponsonby dropped into the furrows, he saw the open nostrils of the dark chestnut close to his saddle-flap. Hethrington came a "crumpler" into the field, but, with a vicious dig of the spur, set his horse on his legs again, and caught Haughton in three strides.

"I'll lay five to two on the Major!" cries a sporting squire.

As he spoke, the blue jacket of Bob Calverly rose and fell with even motion as Stockrider, going within himself, cleared the "Gap."

"I'll take yer!" roared Cleaver, smacking his brawny thigh. "Blowed if the Horstralian won't give 'em trouble yet!"

Here Jemmy Jessamy parted company with his rider; Toodles's gallant steed rose just high enough to stick in the hedge, and the unhappy cornet lit on his head in the ploughed land, presenting a beautifully foreshortened view of the soles of his boots to the admiring spectators.

Carnifex now took the lead—Ladybird, carefully piloted by the cool Major, close on his quarter; Bob Calverly third, evidently biding his time. Haughton and Hethrington were well on together, the man-eater enlivening the monotony of the course by playful endeavours to take a *bonne-bouche* from the neck of the grey. Two or three fences were negotiated without accident, and the five horses between whom it was evident that the race now lay, neared a stiff wall of loose stones, about three feet broad at the top. Carnifex cleared it in his stride. The mare topped the wall like a greyhound, but in doing so lost ground, and Stockrider, with a tremendous rush, and a bound that would have almost cleared Kirkminster steeple, landed half a length before the mare. Bob now called on the colt, and Fred, who knew the powers of

his horse, gave a supercilious smile as the Australian, with a cheery laugh, passed him, and took up the running.

The man-eater's chance was gone, for he rolled heavily over his rider, who had the satisfaction of seeing the splashed girths of the grey fly over him as that gallant little nag landed safely over his fifth fence.

The "three" were close together, but as yet the gazers on the hill could see little change in the pace. Two more fences were successfully passed, and a murmur ran from mouth to mouth as the orange and black drew out to the front, and neared that terror of the Loamshire hunt, Patchly Brook. Patchly Brook was not a pleasant thing to be taken fasting on a raw hunting morning, and even the *insouciant* Fred felt his heart beat quicker as he caught the first glimpse of its dark swirling waters, its rotten banks, and its bad "take off." At it he went, however, hardening his heart, and, obedient to the sounding lash of the whip, Carnifex, with a snort and a bound, flew over the brook, merely wetting his hind hoofs as he landed on the high bank beyond. Loud cheers burst from the crowd, who now felt certain that the Loamshire man would win. Bob Calverly was not a length behind the chestnut, but as he neared the water he could feel Stockrider slackening his pace, and involuntarily prepared for the expected "prop" that would follow. The colt had never seen water before, and, despite the example of the chestnut, he would evidently refuse to jump. Bob turned his head and saw the calm face of the immoveable Major close on his quarter. No time was to be lost. With memories of old "cutting out" days thick upon him, the young Australian seized the colt by the head, and wheeling him on so small a space, that as Ponsonby afterwards declared "a sixpence would have covered it," he brought him close alongside Ladybird as she rose for the leap. One cut of the whip—and the astonished Stockrider obeying the natural instincts of his race, followed the mare and found himself on the other side of Patchly Brook a good third, and one fence from the winning post. Here ended, alas! the fortunes of the gallant grey. That plucky little nag was baked at last, and his rider might have been seen for a moment standing in his stirrups and gazing despairingly at the

gurgling stream that rushed past the obstinately-planted fore legs of the best cover-hack in Loamshire. The excitement was now at its height; and as the horses neared the last fence the cheers were deafening.

Down the straight they came, Carnifex leading, in full view of the stand, and the fashionables on the hill.

The last fence was a stiff one—a strong bramble hedge with two stout rails in the middle of it. Fred never quailed, but, with his eyes fixed, came steadily on. The cheers were louder as he neared the jump.

“Carnifex wins!”

“I’ll lay on Carnifex!”

“Hurray for the regiment!”

“The Major! the Major!”

The horse—his huge shoulders working, his head down, his eyes starting—thundered down the course.

“Too fast—too fast!” cried Larry O’Snaffle, who had forced his cob into the crowd. “Steady, lad—steady!”

But Fred heard not, or if he had he could not have attended. Maddened by the shouts, and the last “punisher” at the brook, Carnifex had taken the bit between his teeth, and, with a vicious shake of his ugly head, had fairly bolted. Fred, exhausted by his endeavours, could do nothing but keep him straight, and, amid a sudden cry from the crowd, the huge brute rushed into the fence. There was no answering crash of timber, the rails were too strong, and turning fairly over, Carnifex fell with a dull thud upon his rider.

Before the crowd could rush in Bob Calverly had dashed to the front, topped the fence, closely followed by the mare, and prepared to run for home. The race was now between two. Those at the other end of the course were in confusion. Had the chestnut fallen? Where was orange and black? Those on the hill had seen too plainly.

As the horses flew past, Bob caught a momentary vision of a white eager face. It was Kate. Unable to resist the temptation, he turned his head, and the impassible Major seizing the moment, dashed spurs into Ladybird, and landed the game little mare, who had run straight as a crow from end to end, a winner by a length.

* * * * *

Down on the course confusion reigned. The crowd hurried like a swarm of bees to one spot—the last fence. Alas! the riding of the gay lieutenant of dragoons was over for ever. There was a horrible confused heap of orange and black and crimson. They pulled the dying horse off him, and Larry O'Snaffle knelt down by his side.

"Has he fainted?" asked Mr. Saville Chatteris, his white lips quivering.

"He is dead!" said the little doctor, dropping the hand that still clutched the jewelled whip convulsively.

Mr. Rupert Dacre, standing a little back from the group, and stroking his long moustache meditatively, murmured,

"Dead, is he? Hum! It can't do me much harm if I telegraph to Cyril."

CHAPTER III.

IN RE CYRIL CHATTERIS.

SAVILLE CHATTERIS, ESQUIRE of Matcham, Loamshire and Grosvenor Square, London, deputy lieutenant for the county, and late ornament of England's bulwark—her diplomatic service—was proud. His pride was not exactly pride of birth, of intellect, or of rank; it was that more subtle and more lasting pride—exaggerated self-respect. He thought that Saville Chatteris, Esquire, etc., etc., was the most honourable, most generous, and most accomplished man in Europe.

He had pinned his faith to the sleeve of his party, and as he owed all the reputation he possessed (apart from that of wealth) to that party, he determined that he owed it all to his own talents, and that he was the prop and mainstay of the ultra-Conservatives. This conclusion was curious, but natural, for men invariably value themselves at the apparent valuation of their private friends, and the world in general is apt to take men at the price they set upon themselves.

The Embassy at Krummelhoff was not a rich one, and as Saville Chatteris occupied the place of ambassador, and used to write lengthy reports of brilliant no-meaning, and,

with the assistance of an unpaid *attaché*, would issue a stray passport or two to a stray Briton, he was looked up to by the English residents. When his father died, Saville was only forty-two, and from being the oracle of a stupid German town, stepped at once into six thousand a year and one of the finest estates in England.

I say six thousand a year, for old Chatteris of the Waste-Paper Office was an economical fellow, and though a poor fifteen hundred a year and an infinity of mortgages was all that his spendthrift uncle had left him, he had succeeded in his long and prudent life in paying off and paying in to such an extent that when Masters Frederick and Cyril, aged thirteen and ten respectively, were forwarded by the Ostend boat like two parcels of merchandise, and reached Matcham at seven p.m. on a cold winter's evening, they voted the Ducal Schloss a dog-kennel compared with their grandfather's house. Saville Chatteris came home, a widower, to find his two sons grown to young men, and his grand-niece, Miss Kate Ffrench, a very charming young woman. His sister, Lady Loughborough (widow of Viscount Loughborough, whose only excuse for living so long was that he left his "dearly beloved wife Sybilla" a jointure of one thousand a year), came down to keep house for him, and the ball of fortune rolled merrily.

Mr. Saville Chatteris, however, had one thorn in his side—his son Cyril. Separated from his children for seven years, and being naturally cold-blooded, he did not give himself much trouble to conciliate their affections. Indeed, it would appear that Kate Ffrench was more to him than his own sons. He liked to pet her, and to be petted by her, and would sit for hours to hear her play or sing to him. With Fred and Cyril, however, the case was different. They were willing to please at first, but their father was too haughty to condescend to more than affability. He had no sympathy with young England or its ways, and would frown at Fred's slang, and laugh at Cyril's dogmas, until the young men looked upon him simply as a machine constructed for the purpose of signing cheques and giving dinners. Of the two, the father preferred Fred. He had a languid impertinence about him that delighted the old man, and being, in his own inane way, a favourite with

the women, the *ex-diplomat* saw, or thought he saw, a reflection of a youthful self in his eldest son. Fred insisted upon going into the army, and after some expostulation a cornetcy in the —th was bought, and Mr. Saville's mirrored youth shone in all the brilliancy of gold lace and bullion.

Cyril never was liked by his father. The boy had always been of a studious turn, and when Fred was galloping after the hounds on his rough pony, or rabbit shooting with the keepers, Cyril would be curled up in the library, reading poetry, or telling monstrous fairy tales to the open-eyed little Kate.

Kate and Cyril were great friends. Perhaps the girl with her warm heart, her strong imagination, and her artistic tastes, was the only person in the house who thoroughly understood the effeminate looking boy who was called "molly-coddle" by his brother, and treated with contempt by all the servants.

Not that Cyril would permit insolence, far from it. He was as vain as two women and one actress, and would show symptoms of violent passion if he thought he had been ridiculed. On these occasions he was positively dangerous, and a large white scar upon the pad-groom's forehead attests, to this day, the good-will of the blow given by the scissors-armed hand of "Miss Cyril" to little Dick, the stable helper.

Eliminate all social polish and natural refinement from the boy's character, and at twelve years of age he was as unpleasant a cub as you could meet anywhere. Cross him, he hated you; laugh at him, he hated you; offend his vanity in the slightest degree, and he hated you. Bow down to the Lilliputian aristocrat, and he despised you; be friendly with him, and he made use of your kindness with utterly selfish disregard of your convenience. His first tutor left Matcham because his life was rendered unbearable by the fiendish insolence of his youngest pupil, who picked out the sore places in the poor fellow's heart, with the ingenuity of a moral Tortillard. He was expelled from his first school for stealing books from one of the other boys, and stupendously lying about it afterwards. He was constantly being flogged at Eton for insolence

and idleness, and to crown all, his own folly caused him to leave Oxford three days before the examination, which ought to have placed his name among the first ten on the list. He was selfish, weak, vain, and unprincipled; but he was clever enough, and though his talents were of a superficial order, they were strongly marked. Had he been brought up with more care, perhaps he might have escaped many a misfortune; but his vanity made him obstinate, and his unhappy mental constitution always urged him to be obstinate on the wrong side. But these faults were invisible on first acquaintance. Cyril Chatteris at nineteen was a good looking, effeminate, impudent, and apparently clever boy. He had a happy knack of appropriating other's conceptions, and would bring them out clothed in his own words, with such appositeness and ease that strangers mistook his plagiarisms for genius. He was given somewhat to poetasting, and plunging, of course, into the depths of the spasmodic and sensual school, wrote verses which almost made him blush as he read them. Kate and he used to ramble about together, and talk an immense amount of nonsense about all sorts of matters.

Kate—like most young girls of strong imaginations and sound principles—was given to religious enthusiasms, and would weep over Cyril's delinquencies and exhort him to repentance.

The boy liked this. It was so pleasant to be considered a Corsair, or a Cæsar Borgia, and to be petted and kissed into goodness again, and he would purposely say "wicked things" to make Kate's violet eyes fill with tears, and to know that he had pained the thing that loved him best in the world. By the way, it is curious that there should be pleasure in paining one we love. It was said once that no delight can be perfect without sorrow, and that we must

Pluck red pleasure from the teeth of pain

to taste the full flavour of the wine of life. Cyril must have had this feeling, for it is certain that at one time of his life he loved his cousin, and he lifted the cup of bitterness to her lips with a steady hand and smiling mouth.

It was fortunate for these two fools that they were too young to know their folly. The poetical tendencies are dangerous things to cultivate. As it was, I fear that when Cyril went to Oxford, he took his cousin's heart with him.

Old Saville imagined that Fred was the one favoured by his niece. For Kate was given to riding, and dancing, and flirting, and had the reputation around Matcham of being rather "fast." She was a strong, healthy girl, with a natural inclination to exercise her limbs and breathe pure air.

"Fred is just the man for her," thought Saville, who, nevertheless, hardly liked the notion of so poor a bride for his son. "She always talks to Fred, and never says much to the other one."

But the old dandy was wrong. Kate had just arrived at that stage of womanhood when concealment is more pleasant than confession, and she only knew that she loved Cyril Chatteris because she was always uneasy in his presence. When he was away she used to wander about Matcham and dream of Sir Bevidere, Sir Launcelot, and other heroes of maiden dreams, half unconscious that they all had white hands and grey eyes, and like Cyril, were rather wicked than otherwise.

Matcham was a place well suited for such musings. The country around it was very beautiful. In autumn, when the trees were turning yellow, and the leaves silently dropping to earth, and rotting in the dark rich soil; when after a storm that shook the boughs and shrilled over the fallow lands—when the last footsteps of the rain had departed with a cool pattering sound, and from grove and coppice went up a fragrance like music—it was an exquisite pleasure to stroll down the village, and passing the pool by the church where the ducks were splashing—passing the blacksmith's with its glowing furnace (like a picture by Rembrandt), nodding to the homeward-bound cart—its occupants, a yokel and a rosy-faced child, shaking off the drops of the shower which had reached them under the grey awning—to turn down by the stile and into the wood borders. Matcham woods were renowned throughout the county, but I always think that they are best seen after rain—when the mighty purple black cloud, the last in the train of the departing storm, slowly melts down the grey—

when the silver beech trunks no longer glisten under the rainy lights that find their way through the jagged gashes and gaps in the veil above—when the sun, sinking through golden mists behind the wooded hill, suddenly asserts his power, and with fierce stabs of crimson rends the flimsy storm-veil asunder, and flooding with weltering flushes of green and gold the space above the black tree tops, slowly sinks behind them. When at last the cloud melts away, the mighty heart of fire that welled forth such glorious light, stills, and above in the fathomless ether, above the sea of molten clouds, above the silver strand of light, above the fleecy grey tresses that the wild wind has blown all about the sky, in a delicate space of apple-green ether shines the Evening Star.

The nameless influence of these things affected Kate, and as she wandered dreamily in the glades and lanes of Matcham, she began to invest the figure of her absent lover with many graces that did not in good truth belong to it, and to nourish her passion until it grew almost beyond her control. Love, fed upon autumn tints, glowing skies, sweet perfumes, and delicate airs, is apt to thrive, and thus it happened that during Cyril's first term at Oxford Miss Kate Ffrench found out one afternoon, while walking in the hazel copse, that she loved him very dearly, and had been counting the hours to the time of his return with more than friendly interest.

And Cyril himself? Well, he hardly knew his own mind, he certainly had a contemptuous affection for his cousin, because she always admitted him to be right, and looked up to him as a superior being. But he was not much disturbed by any violence of passion, and went about his usual ways unconcernedly.

Between you and me, reader, he was not half good enough for her; but women have always had a happy knack of falling in love with people who are just exactly unsuited for them, and of persistently ignoring the existence of 'the heaven-sent mate who, according to the story-books, is wandering and waiting somewhere.

About this time, too, Mr. Cyril began to feel his feet strike something firmer than the shifting sand of youthful dreams, and to think that he had found his *métier* at last.

Being up at London one winter he met his school-fellow, Rupert Dacre (who used to fag him at Eton), and Mr. Rupert Dacre introduced him to some very queer society indeed. Among the many people he met at that period was Blister of the *Morning Mercury*, at that time a Liberal journal. As old Chatteris was ultra-Conservative to the backbone, naturally his son was exactly the opposite, and being somewhat excited at dinner one night, made such a brilliant and lucid defence of the Radical party (the ideas, of course, being *réchauffés* from some obscure author) that Mr. Blister shifted in his chair and asked his neighbour "who that young fellow was?"

The neighbour was young also, and not having left college long, was well posted up in all matters of the kind.

"Oh, that's Chatteris of Christ's. Rather a good man, they say. He is a quiet fellow, but devilish clever;" and the *censor morum* helped himself to claret.

"Ha! Christchurch man, is he? Any relation to old Chatteris of the Foreign Office?"

"Son!"

"Oh!" and Blister moved his chair further down the table.

Some time after this incident, the great struggle over the Franchise-reform bill began. The *Morning Mercury* began to be spoken of. It was unusually brilliant. A series of articles on the Franchise attracted attention. The writer was unknown. "They have got some new man," growled the Conservative editor of the *Conservative Evening Herald*. "New blood! His facts are all right, and his style is smart, but there is nothing new in what he says."

The "new man" was Cyril Chatteris. He was wonderfully proud of his new-found powers, and despatched letter upon letter from Oxford, all of which appeared in the columns of the *Mercury*. He came down to Matcham, and still the writing went on. The *Morning Mercury* became quite a thorn in the side of the Government. Not that they cared for fine writing, style, or logic, but because little hints as to Government policy, or to the state of Government patronage, would creep out every now and then,

with insidious pertinacity. Mr. Saville Chatteris, who, as became him, took a great interest in politics, was pleasantly annoyed about it, and grumbled in a well-bred manner at breakfast, at the audacity of the people. Saville Chatteris, indeed, went the length of embodying his views in his next letter to the Earl of Foozleton, the Prime Minister, an old friend of his.

This was done just at the time when Cyril was on the top wave of article-writing, and eager and panting for the shore of fame. Foozleton, though Prime Minister, being somewhat too prone to chatter, replied to his old friend's letter by another, which set forth in unmistakable terms the policy of the Government. This letter was received the day before Cyril returned to Christchurch; and as that young gentleman went into the library for the purpose of requesting the paternal machine to produce a cheque of somewhat larger amount than usual, he saw the letter of the minister on the table.

I have said that Cyril was utterly unprincipled, and in his present political frame of mind, the well-known blotch, that was presumed by courtesy to be Foozleton's signature, was enough to send a thrill through his heart. It happened that Mr. Saville Chatteris was out, and that the room was empty.

Under these circumstances, his son walked deliberately to the writing-table, and with many starts and twitchings at supposed openings of the door, read the minister's letter through from beginning to end. The day after, he went back to Oxford to take his degree.

The well-informed neighbour of the editor of the *Morning Mercury* was not wrong when he said that Cyril Chatteris was one of the first men of his year—that is, socially. Chatteris was the idol of a certain set. He neither rode, nor boated. The cricket-ground and the racket-court knew him not; and he never played practical jokes. But he was supposed by his friends to be able to do all these things, and to be quiet, because *blasé*. It is strange what heroes young men make of each other; and to hear the conversation of some thirty men at Christchurch, you would think that the college contained a man who was three Admirable Crichtons rolled into

one. It was said that the quiet-looking effeminate youth could box, row, and fence with Caunt, the Claspers, or Angelo; that he wrote essays like Macaulay, poems like Tennyson, *vers de société* like Praed, could play billiards like R——, and was a better classic than the dean. While the absolute truth was, that he could do a very little of all these things, but had wit enough to leave off in time. He had built his reputation on the sand, and was careful that no side-wind of absolute proof should blow upon it.

In the meantime the political crisis was approaching. The Government was promising concessions; the Liberals were agitating, and the people's cry was all against the bill. But the Government declared itself sure of success. The reckless extension of franchise must be put a stop to, and if the bill was once passed, their promised concessions might be thought of. The leading journals attempted to soothe the masses. Such concessions as were promised by the Ministry were all that could be expected or required. The people must yield. In vain did Blethers, the newly-risen "Man of the people," call mob meetings in every town in England; in vain did the Liberal journals call upon the "people" to rise and defend their rights; in vain was Hyde Park crammed with the orators of the "League;" it was evident that the Government was too strong.

Things were at this pass, when on the day appointed for the reading of the obnoxious measure, a brilliant article appeared in the *Morning Mercury*, which, while blinking the question of expediency, stated in the plainest terms that the Ministry was pledged to pass the measure or resign, that the promised concessions would never be made, gave an authoritative sketch of the future policy of the Foozleton Cabinet, and printed quotations from an alleged "written document in our possession" which utterly denied all hope of compromise, and challenged the Government to disprove its assertions. The effect was electrical. The paper sold nearly a double issue; Foozleton went down to the house as in a confused dream. He could not reply to the questions asked. His own party whispered that the blackest treachery had

been used somewhere. The Opposition rushed open-mouthed at the "noble lord," and in a trice his moral character was torn to shreds. The bill was not even read, and at nine o'clock next morning Foozleton was *en route* for Castle Slattery, County Donegal, and all England rang with the news of the resignation of the Ministry.

Blister was in ecstasies, and wrote a letter to Cyril, couched in the most complimentary terms; for, of course, you have guessed that it was the ingenious scoundrelism of that talented young man that had upset the ministry. But Foozleton himself was not so pleased. His hopes of political life were over for ever. He thought for a long time as to how the writer could have obtained his information (he put out of the question the letter to Saville Chatteris; the two men had been friends from boyhood); and, after much cogitation, wrote to the best informed man in London, Mr. Rupert Dacre:

"Castle Slattery.

"DEAR DACRE,—How is town? Country very dull. I suppose the news of the breakdown has put S—— and M—— in spirits. It is to be regretted for many reasons. I was thinking of making some changes in your department, which will now, perhaps, be indefinitely deferred. I see the *Chron.* did what it could for us, which was not much. I suppose I thank you for it. I cannot understand how the *Mercury* gets its information. Have you any notion who writes for it?

"Yours faithfully,

"FOOZLETON.

"Rupert Dacre, Esq., F.O."

"Who writes for it?" repeated Mr. Rupert Dacre, as he folded up the minister's letter carefully. "I suppose you mean who wrote the article that put you out of place?"

That afternoon Dacre went to the office of the *Mercury*.

"Ah! Blister, how are you, old fellow? I am going to have a few to dinner, on Friday, at my place. Will you come?"

"With all the pleasure in the world, my dear boy!" returned Blister, who knew exactly why he was asked. "But I am up to the eyes in work just now. Close upon six, you know. Letters!"

"So I see," said Rupert, casting a glance at the envelopes that littered the floor. He saw one with the Oxford postmark, and the well-known "C. C." in the corner (Cyril had a weakness for initialing his letters). "Ah! does Master Cyril write for you?" asked he, carelessly picking up the envelope.

Blister made some nonchalant answer, and the matter dropped.

Three days afterwards the Earl of Foozleton got his reply:

"37 Brook Street.

"MY DEAR LORD,—Thanks for your kind note. Town is slower than ever. There is some talk of M—— being in the new Cabinet. I sincerely hope not. It is reported also that R—— will not take office after the *esclandre* last year at Brighton. He is afraid of the papers. By the way, that reminds me of your question about the *Mercury*.

"I fancy the 'new hand' is a man at Christchurch, named Chatteris, a son of Saville Chatteris, who, I think, corresponds with you. He is a clever young fellow, I understand, but not very prudent. Have you read Bamforth's *Thibet*? Capital book; town all talking of it.

"Yours truly,

"RUPERT DACRE.

"R. H. the Earl of Foozleton."

"D—— *Thibet*!" exclaimed the ex-Prime Minister. "Saville would never have done such a confoundedly shabby thing, surely. I'll write and ask him."

The letter, couched in the most delicate terms, was written and sent.

* * * * *

"I give up an old friend's letter to a confounded Radical paper!" exclaimed Saville Chatteris. "He cannot be in his senses. Yet it looks strange, I admit. He has more sense than to write to anybody but me in the strain he did, and at such a time. Could anybody have seen the letter? I left it in the library, I remember, but no one was there but Cyril. He has no interest in doing such a thing. I have heard that the boy scribbles too.

But still! Kate, have you ever heard that Cyril wrote anything?"

"How do you mean, uncle?"

"That he wrote for the papers."

Now Cyril, in the exuberance of his vanity, had told his cousin of his triumphant entry into literature.

"I believe he has written something in a London paper," said Kate, blushing.

"Which one?"

"The *Morning Mercury*."

All his good breeding could scarcely repress the angry exclamation that rose to the lips of the indignant Mr. Chatteris.

"The infernal young scoundrel! I'll—I'll—"

And he rose from the breakfast table hurriedly, to the intense alarm of Kate, who was ignorant what criminals Radicals were in the eyes of her respected uncle.

* * * * *

Cyril was on thorns about his degree. Despite the plaudits and flattery of his friends, he well knew that it was more than probable that he should be ignominiously "spun," or come out at the very bottom of the list of heroes.

He meditated illness, sudden breakdown from overwork, or an accident, which would give him time to repent and coach up for next term.

"I will take my name off the books," said he, "rather than be 'plucked.'"

But what could he do? Go to the bar, or take up journalism as a profession? Blister was complimentary enough. He was in this undecided frame of mind, when an indignant letter from his father cut the Gordian knot. The high-minded old gentleman was cut to the heart at learning that a son of his should have stooped to such dishonour. To write for a Radical paper was bad enough; but to read his father's letters, and basely to make use of information therein contained, was infamous. And he expressed his opinion in no measured terms.

Cyril felt the disgrace deeply. He did not care one jot for the ethics of the business; but the being found out was intolerable.

"I wonder who told him? If the story is known, I shall be socially ruined," thought he.

After twelve hours' calm reflection, however, and a still more complimentary letter from Blister, he came to the conclusion that his father must have guessed at his delinquency.

"Hang it! I'll cut this place, and go in for writing," said he; and forthwith took his name off the books, to the amazement of all Oxford, and went down to Matcham.

He was not prepared, though, for his reception. His father was furious at the sudden termination of his son's career, and informed him that if he chose to write for Radical journals, he should not do it in *his* house, upbraided him with his dishonourable conduct, and finally told him that he was heir to two hundred pounds a year left him by his mother—that that sum should be paid quarterly into Coutts's for him—and that he might take himself off as soon as he pleased.

Cyril, in his overweening vanity, saw nothing but fame before him, and with a cold parting from Kate, went up to London, entered himself for the bar, and establishing himself in Dym Street, became a recognised member of the *Mercury* staff.

He had been five months in his new abode when the events took place which I have recorded in the first chapter of this history.

It may seem strange, perhaps, that a man of his tastes should be so smitten by the charms of a girl like Caroline; but Cyril Chatteris was weak in character, vain to excess, and prone to succumb to the accidents of the present.

He did not care to face his old friends. Christchurch in general believed that some dark mystery had enveloped his sudden departure; and all sorts of stories were afloat, in which debts, duns, horses, play, and women, variously figured. So Cyril Chatteris, at twenty-two, found himself an accredited citizen of Bohemia, and engaged to be married to his landlady's daughter.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEDDING GIFT.

WHEN Mrs. Manton arose the morning after the proposals of her lodger had taken place, she arose with a thrill of delight, and while untwisting her curl papers (she had the most spiral and natural curls in the world), she thought of the Paradise that was opening before her.

"Of course I shall live with Carry," said she. "Mr. Chatteris must be rich. It's all very fine to live retired, but when gentlemen get letters with coronets on the h'envelopes, they must be somethink. I suppose he's had a quarrel with his family and wants to let it blow over. I'll find out all about him now at all events. Carry's made a match of it, and no mistake; but he's a weak-minded feller, and might draw back when he's cooler. I'll go and talk to him to-day," and so she did.

Cyril had breakfast in a somewhat curious fashion. Maria Jane, who brought up the tea things, smiled and giggled in a curious way that ruffled his nerves considerably. "What did Maria Jane want with his affairs?" He felt half angry with himself, and gulped down his tea as though that cheering but uninebriating beverage could drown the distrust that would keep rising in his throat.

He looked round the room, and made mental comparisons between his "den" at Christchurch; and then his thoughts flew back to the well-lighted breakfast room at Matcham, with his prim father at one end of the snowy table and Kate at the other; Kate! he thought of a scene in the park last spring, when she——

"Come in!"

A timid knock broke his reverie, and the door opening disclosed Miss Carry, blushing like a rose, and looking bewitching in her rustling morning dress. Kate was forgotten in an instant.

"My darling Carry!" and the sordid little room straightway became a palace.

It may perhaps be doubted by some of you, that Caroline was really in love with her affianced husband.

I think that she was. Remember that she never had been in love before; that Cyril was handsome, talkative, and her *superior*; and also that with most young girls the first one who talks of love is the first one to awaken it.

For the time she was very happy. Naturally she thought of dresses and jewels, and other matters, but still she remembered that the young man at her side was the good genius who was to give her all these fine things, and she loved him accordingly.

So, the pair sat side by side on the sofa, and cooed like turtle-doves.

By and by Mrs. Manton in splendour imperial of cap ribbons, entered without knocking.

This little familiarity annoyed Cyril. It was the first tug of the chain.

"Don't disturb yourself, my dear," says she, seating herself with ponderous grace in one of the arm-chairs, and then she tittered. Cyril blushed hot crimson.

"Good morning!" said he, and arose, under pretence of lighting his pipe. (He could not bear that *he* should be caught love-making.) "Do you object to my smoking?"

"Not a bit, my boy—I rather like it."

Cyril struck a match angrily. Would nothing move the woman? He scowled pettishly. The match went out. Carry tripped across the room and lighted another for him, with a coquettish look.

His brow cleared, and he kissed her on the forehead.

Mrs. Manton looked out of the window and smiled. "She can twist him round her little finger!" said she.

* * * * *

Cyril went down to the *Mercury* office two days afterwards.

"I say, Blister," said he, "I suppose you won't have much doing for a week or so?"

"Why?"

"Why, I want a holiday. I haven't been very well lately, and——"

"Oh, of course—whenever you like," returned Blister, who rather pitied the prodigal whom he had helped to ruin; "and if you want any money, old fellow——"

"No, thank you. I received my allowance last week, and I have been economical lately."

Enter Mr. Rupert Dacre.

"Ha, Cyril! You're not looking well."

"No—going to take a holiday for a week or two," says Blister.

"Quite right. I'm going out of town, too."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Down to Loamshire."

Cyril turned away. "I will send you up that matter to-night, Blister, and shall be back again in a fortnight."

"Wait a minute," says Rupert, "I'm going down the street."

So the two men went out together.

"Have you heard from Matcham, Chatteris?" asked Rupert, after a pause.

"No. I get my interest regularly paid, and that is all I ever hear of them," returned Cyril, bitterly.

"I am going down there to-morrow."

"Oh!" (*A pause.*) "You needn't say that you met me."

DACRE (*aside*). That means, "I wish you would tell them that you met me." (*Aloud*). Oh, no—of course not.

CYRIL. I think I shall go down to Brighton for a day or two. I want some fresh air.

DACRE (*mentally*). Brighton in September! I wonder what is the matter with him. (*Aloud*). Yes—a capital place. Fine and breezy just now. Well, then, you've no messages?

CYRIL. No!—Yes! You might tell Fred, if you see him, that I am all right, you know. He's at Kirkminster, isn't he?

DACRE. Yes. He wrote to me yesterday, telling me some nonsense about a garrison steeplechase. I hate racing across country myself.

CYRIL (*who is thinking of something else*). Yes, of course.

DACRE (*suddenly*). Hallo! Who's that in the cab?

A hackney cab was preparing to drive up to the curb. A fat old woman and a pretty young one were inside it. The front seat was loaded with parcels. They had been shopping, evidently.

"The little one is making signs to you," says Dacre.

Cyril blushed, and looked confused.

"Yes," said he. "A little friend of mine. Excuse me."

"Oh, of course, my dear boy," returned Dacre, with a laugh.

Cyril went across to the cab, opened the door, and got in.

Rupert watched it turn the corner.

"She is a very pretty girl, whoever she is," thought he. "I wonder what the boy is up to? Brighton in September—hum! Well, I suppose I shall know by and by. Here, cabby!—Brook-street."

So Mr. Rupert Dacre went his ways to Matcham.

Cyril was fairly in the toils. As Mrs. Manton had remarked, Carry could twist him round her little finger. The two ladies had decided that the marriage should take place instantly. They wished, indeed, that it should be a public matter; that numerous bridesmaids should attend; that a big cake should be made; that Dym Street should be awakened by the glory of Hymen; that carriages should stand before the Mantonian door; and that Cyril should be led in triumph at his wife's chariot-wheels. Carry, indeed, had visions of St. George's, and paragraphs in the *Morning Post*. But these dreams were rudely dispelled by Chatteris.

"We will get married as quietly as possible," said he, with an angry flush rising on his face: and Mrs. Manton, who had found out by this time that, however weak and pliable her son-in-law might be, he had a "temper of his own," wisely gave way. She had sense enough to see that the marriage was too good a thing to be thrown away, and that if she leant upon the matrimonial reed too heavily, it would break, and pierce her hand.

Cyril had determined upon his course of action. He would get married quietly, and go away to Boulogne for a week or so. Then return and work hard for his bread, and perhaps become a great author. Young men are always sanguine, and the leader-writer for the *Mercury* saw no possible obstacle to his success as a *litterateur*. Having made his name, he would return to Matcham, shake off the dust from his literary feet against the place, and prove that he could live upon his own resources.

Meanwhile Carry was shopping with all the ardour of a youthful Comanche on his first war-trail. It was extraordinary how many things were necessary to her now, that had been regarded as utterly useless or unobtainable before. Cyril danced attendance upon his future bride at all the shops in Oxford Street. Regent Street "counter-hands" knew him well, and the cabmen at the stand in Dym Street pricked up their ears when they saw his figure approaching.

Mr. Paul Rendlesham, the poverty-stricken curate of the Hon. and Rev. Vere St. Simeon, was the man chosen to perform the ceremony, and the usual tax upon matrimony—with all the shape of a license fee—was paid in due course.

The eventful day arrived. Carry prayed hard that some of her female acquaintances might be present to witness her triumph, but the inexorable Cyril refused.

"You don't love me, Cy-cy-ril," says she.

Cy-cy-ril shrugged his shoulders.

"My darling girl, be reasonable. What do we want with all those confounded women?"

"Well, but to be married in such a quiet way, with nobody by!"

"It appears to me, my dear girl, that you marry me, not your bridesmaids," says Cyril, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"Oh, Cyril!"

"There, that will do. Upon my word, Carry, you are very unreasonable."

Carry saw that it was no use to quarrel, so she gave up the contest, and was kissed and consoled.

The wedding took place. One solitary hackney cab was all the splendour permitted. Mrs. Manton stayed at home to look after the dinner, and Cyril and Carry went off alone. They were to start for Folkestone that afternoon, and to return to Dym Street in a fortnight's time.

The ceremony was performed by Mr. Rendlesham, to the edification (it is to be hoped) of a pew-opener and of those nameless and curious persons who always attend weddings, and who, sitting in the gallery, nudge each other furtively and comment on the appearance of the bride.

Carry was weeping, and laughing, and smiling all at

once, and Cyril was rather oppressed than otherwise. He was nervous as to the results of the step he was taking. All the morning he had felt in a bad humour, and had he had the courage would have run away from his bride altogether. Yet a look from her was enough to rivet his chains again, and when he passed out of church with his wife upon his arm, and heard a snuffy old woman say, "What a pretty gal, to be sure!" he felt a thrill of pride and pleasure. They reached home.

The instant the cab stopped the door was opened. Cyril led his wife into the hall. Mrs. Manton appeared hurriedly, but instead of embracing her daughter she made straight for Cyril.

"Here's a telegram sent down from the *Mercury* office," cried she. "The boy said it was 'immediate.' I hope nothink's wrong, Mr. Chatteris!"

Cyril opened the envelope.

TO CYRIL CHATTERIS,

Mercury Office, Fleet Street.

TO BE FORWARDED.

Steeplechase. Fred injured. Lose no time.

RUPERT DACRE.

He turned pale. A rapid vision flashed before him. A falling horse—his brother crushed and dying—a funeral—a reconciliation, and a new heir to Matcham.

A new heir——! His breath came quickly.

"What is it, Cyril darling?"

He looked down upon his wife. Her soft eyes were full of tears, and her hand trembled. She looked the embodiment of love and pity. The news of his fortune (for such it seemed to him) was on his lips.

"Lor, Mr. Cyril, what's the matter? Why, you're as pale as a ghost!"

The vulgar accents grated on his ear. He thought of Lady Loughborough and Kate, and crushed the paper in his hand convulsively. A second vision—of Mrs. Manton at Matcham—came before him.

"Nothing—nothing!" said he; "only a business matter. I shall have to go down to the office at once."

"Oh, Cyril!"

Cyril was touched by his wife's cry. She clung to him alarmedly.

"Never mind, my dear child. I shall be back soon;" and he pressed his lips to hers. Had she been alone, he would have told her all, but the die was cast now.

Carry was in tears. Mrs. Manton took her in her arms.

"Go to the office *now*, Mr. Chatteris!" she cried.

But Cyril had jumped into the wedding-cab and had driven off.

* * * * *

That night a dirty-faced boy brought a letter to Dym Street for "Mrs. Chatteris."

"MY DARLING CARRY.—I find that urgent business will take me into the country for a day or two. It costs me much to leave you at such a time, but I cannot help it. Do not be alarmed, my darling, I shall be back soon, and then I will explain it all to you. God bless you, my darling wife.—Your loving husband,

"CYRIL."

"Explain it all." Would he, I wonder?

CHAPTER V.

FIRST LINKS.

THERE was death in the house!

Most of us, alas! can realise the full meaning of the phrase. It means that servants step softly, that voices are subdued, that blinds are drawn down, that the flowers do not smell so sweetly, that the sun does not shine so brightly, that books seem to have lost their power to charm, that pictures seem to have lost their colouring; that those matters that were of such importance yesterday are now without interest; that we are removed by a great gulf from our passions, joys, and sorrows of twelve hours back; that a leaden weight is upon our hearts; that a veil is drawn between us and God's heaven; that all our

slighting words, our unkind actions towards him who was our brother yesterday, rise up like reproachful phantoms to haunt us for ever; and that—most cruel of all—the world without is eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, without a thought for us, or for our sorrow.

There was death at Matcham. Despite Mr. Saville Chatteris being the most gentlemanly of mortals, and the staunchest of Conservatives, that audacious Radical who rides on the pale horse of universal equality had paid him a visit and taken his son away *en croupe*.

Poor Fred! He was the last person that should have been so remorselessly levelled by the keen sickle of the reaper. A gay, good-humoured, careless fellow, with a tolerable seat on a horse, some success among silly women of the milliner sort, and a firm belief in his own abilities—what should he do in that galley where Death and the Lady throw dice for the souls of men?

He was heir to Matcham, lieutenant in a dragoon regiment, five-and-twenty years of age, was killed by a fall from his horse, was buried in Matcham churchyard, and the passionless tide of life flows on over his grave without so much as a ripple.

Apart from the natural shock attendant upon his sudden removal, nobody regretted him much. The verdict of the service in general was, "Poor Fred Chatteris is killed, I see! Horse fell with him at a steeplechase. Nothing like blood for going across country. Sabretasche, ring for another 'peg.'" Lady Loughborough shed some natural tears, but wiped them sooner than usual, and though she kept her room, and affected a low tone of voice, as suitable to the "sad accident to poor dear Fred," she was not absolutely overcome with grief. Kate was, physically, the most affected of anybody. She was so close to him when he fell, had been brought up with him from childhood, and felt that natural horror of sudden and violent deaths which all persons of exuberant vitality must feel; but even she was merely physically grieved. Mr. Saville Chatteris was chief mourner. He had never discovered how much he had loved his son till he saw him dead at his feet. He had regarded the young man

as a work of art created by his own hands, and which was to reflect honour upon the artist. But as the coffin slowly disappeared into the vault, he felt that it contained much that was left to him of earthly happiness, and he suffered more than his cold, proud nature would permit him to express. Cyril had arrived the day after the accident, and in his inmost heart was the least sorrowful of all the party. Even Mr. Rupert Dacre, who had been requested by the master of the house to remain until his surviving son arrived, was more affected at the matter than Cyril; that is to say, he seemed to be so; for the budding diplomatist was fond of confessing the soft impeachment of "materialism," and would argue with his select friends concerning the impossibility of everything he did not understand, and would avow, with a playful wave of his cigar, "that, for his part, he saw nothing more in a dead man than a lump of clay, you know."

On this occasion, however, he found it politic to dismiss these conclusions, and was as consolatory as his nature permitted him to be. During the administering of these consolations, he found time to watch the bearing of the various persons around him, and more especially that of the new heir.

"He is strangely preoccupied about something," thought Dacre. "He has got something on his mind, I expect. Debts, perhaps; but that should give him no uneasiness now. It can't be affection for his brother—for I don't think that the fellow cared much about him, or anybody else but himself."

Mr. Rupert Dacre was wrong. It was not of himself that Cyril was thinking. It was of his wife. Should he tell his father, and risk another breach of filial and paternal peace? They had been reconciled now, at least as far as outward seeming went. The old man was frigidly polite to his returned prodigal, and requested him to issue instructions touching several domestic matters, a request which Cyril construed into a tacit recognition of his rights as heir, but as yet no fattened calf had practically or allegorically been killed.

Kate had witnessed this negative reconciliation in wondering pity. Cyril appeared so careworn, too. He was un-

usually silent and *distract*. Everyone but Mr. Rupert Dacre being for the present in mental sackcloth and ashes, this was permitted to pass unregarded, but the quick eyes of loving Kate detected at once that her cousin had something else on his mind beside grief for his brother.

Two days after the funeral, Cyril could bear the suspense no longer. In the first place he longed to see his wife, in the second he was ill at ease in the gloomy house, and with his prevailing selfishness, he wished to quit all that reminded him of sorrow or pain. Then, his father had given him no clue to the course he intended to pursue with regard to him. "He will never leave me to starve upon two hundred pounds a year," thought he; but then, what would he wish him to do? To give up the *Mercury*, of course. His vanity revolted at the notion. To come and live at Matcham? Perhaps; but then what should he do with Carry? To study for the bar in London? That would be feasible enough; he could then conceal his marriage. Yet, it must be confessed some time or other. After his father's death? Saville Chatteris was healthy and vigorous, and might live for years. It would be better to confess it at once and "have it over." He would do so.

As he turned to go to the library, he met a servant with a tray containing Lady Loughborough's "afternoon tea," (her ladyship choosing to keep her apartments during the period of mourning). Instantly a vision arose before him. Mrs. Manton, in curls and cap-ribbons, rubbing one fat hand over the other as she curtsied to her son-in-law's aunt, was visible in his mind's eye, and he turned back again.

"I will get rid of that villanous old woman, and then I will bring Carry down here," said he; and, somewhat calmed by this reflection, he walked out into the lawn, and lighting a cigar as he went, strolled down toward the shrubbery.

There had been a shower in the morning, and the watery grey rain clouds were yet hanging over distant Kirkminster; but Matcham woods were in their glory, rich with autumn tints and bathed in autumn sunset. One long streak of crimson barred the western sky; but the

windows of the house were all ablaze and reflected light; its many turrets, gables, and buttresses were distorted with every variety of shadow. The air was delicate and pure, the birds chirruped and twittered among distant orchard branches; and with an incessant and melancholy cawing, a black line of rooks flapped heavily homewards athwart the pure golden sky.

The hour and the place were favourable to musing, and Mr. Rupert Dacre was extended at full length on a bench in the Beech-tree walk, listening with half-shut eyes to the silvery and intermittent chiming of the far off cathedral bells.

"Ah—Cyril!" and the two young men sat down together.

Cyril looked round upon the soft landscape, up into the pure heaven, down on to the hard and mossy gravel, and then up again into his companion's face. He saw only the sunset-light reflected there.

"Rupert, I'm going back to London—"

"You can't go now, my dear boy," said Dacre, with enforced solemnity.

"I cannot stand this sort of thing long. My father won't speak to me, and the house is like some vast tomb," says Cyril, pettishly kicking a loose stone with one pendant foot.

"My dear fellow, you must not be too rash. Remember that the unhappy accident has affected your father deeply."

"I say, Dacre, what made you telegraph to me so quickly?" says Chatteris, suddenly.

"Merely to let you know at once. Everybody else seemed helpless. What made you ask such a question?"

"Oh, I don't know," returned the other, whose steady look into that sunset-lit face had shown him nothing. "It was very kind of you, I'm sure."

"My dear boy!" says Dacre, deprecatingly. As he spoke, the sun fell suddenly behind the tree-tops, and the glory faded from his face.

Cyril fancied he saw a sneer there. "Come," said he, with a slight shudder, "it is getting chill; let us go in."

Rupert Dacre flung the stump of his smouldering cigar gently from him. It fell into a little pool that the recent rain had left among the stones, and went out with a sullen hissing sound.

"Give me your arm, my dear fellow," said he, with a most consolatory smile, "I want to talk to you a little."

"In the first place," began the rising young diplomatist—"you will excuse an old friend who used to fag you at Eton, telling you an unwholesome truth. You are—well, not a fool—but a man of perverted intellect. You had a capital career open to you, and you spoilt it all by your preposterous folly and vanity. Now don't interrupt me—but listen. You had an excellent chance of honours—at least so they tell me—and you quit Oxford for some reason that I don't want to hear, for it is sure to be a bad one. You come home here, quarrel with your very worthy and estimable father, and rush up to London, to make a fortune and a name by dishing up other people's sentiments in the leading columns of a Radical newspaper. This may be a very fine thing to be able to do, my dear boy, perhaps it is; but permit me to suggest that the son—the *only* son" (and he emphasised the word with eyes as well as voice) "of Mr. Chatteris of Matcham, ought to do something better. A leader-writer for a paper like the *Mercury* is not a man of mark in the annals of his country, my dear Cyril; and if you want fame, you can get it easier by inventing a patent pill, or a new method of pickling pork, than by all the leading articles that ever went to the butter-shop." (They had reached the end of the walk by this time, and the cynical Mentor of five-and-twenty paused for a moment to let his wisdom sink into the ears of his pupil.) "I was speaking to your father this morning," (Cyril began to listen), "and he seemed in a great perplexity about your future career. Indeed, he did me the honour to ask my advice upon the matter"—

"The deuce he did"—thought Telemachus—

"And I have been thinking all the afternoon about it. There can be no question but that he intends to make you a proper allowance—that is, if you behave yourself—but I would not advise you to indulge in any pranks, or you may get into mischief again. I suppose," continued he, with a curious glance at his companion, "that you are not in any scrape just now."

"In any scrape!" Oh, if he only knew! But Cyril said, with an easy laugh, "None, my dear fellow, that I know of!"

"I am glad to hear it; but if you are, you had better go and tell your father at once, and begin with a clean bill of health."

Here was a temptation! He would go to his father and tell him all, and make the best of it. He had half withdrawn his arm from Dacre's, for the purpose of giving more weight to his declaration, when the other struck in—

"Marriage, my dear Cyril, is the great sheet anchor of young men! If you assume the burden of respectability, you must also assume the burden of matrimony. If you elect to dwell in tents, it does not so much matter; but to the well-being of a Philistine a wife is absolutely necessary. For myself, I am unable to afford that luxury at present, but, I trust that, after some brief space of time, the value of my services to my country may be more satisfactorily recognised, and I may be enabled to take to my bosom some skinny person of good blood and aristocratic connections. I have observed," remarked Mr. Rupert Dacre, parenthetically, "that leanness and good blood are indispensable for a rising man's wife—I trust to obtain both. But for you, my dear fellow, seriously speaking, a much wider field is open. You can choose, with reservations of course, where you will. Do you prefer money? Seek it among the chubby heiresses of provincial manufacturing towns; the simpering daughters of City magnates, or the more dashing progeny of the lords of the Stock Exchange. Do you desire blood? You can take your choice of all the vintages in Debrett, and stock your cellar either with the blushing glories of the Battle-Abbey brand, or the more recent but perhaps more healthy bottlings of the reign of the First James; indeed, with the exception of Lady Millicent Lepel, whose parents have been saving her for nineteen years for the young Duke of Bilboquet; and old Foozleton's daughter, who is going to marry What's-his-name the coach-builder, I believe you can have any woman you like. I should therefore recommend, my dear fellow, that you put off your Bohemian 'old man' from you, and enduing yourself with the *toga virilis* of Philistian respectability, come out as a country gentleman. Life here," continued Dacre, with an airy wave of his hand toward the fast-darkening land-

scape, "is pleasant enough. The *recubans sub tegmine fagi* business, which has been discoursed upon at such length by the poets, is yours for ever. You will settle down here, hunt a pack of hounds, go to church twice a day on Sundays, and breed short-horned bullocks. This is, as I take it, the whole duty of man in his capacity as country gentleman. You will grow fat and good tempered; give dinners and drink port wine for the remainder of your existence. As that preposterous creation of Lord Lytton remarks in the second act of the most successful and most claptrap drama of modern times, 'Dost like the picture?'"

"No," says Cyril, laughing, "I don't."

"Ah! you have a soul above short-horns. What do you say then to Parliament? A great field for men of ability. Will you be the darling of drawing-rooms, the perfumed dandy of Belgravia, the harmless lion of ambassadors' dinners, the abused one of newspapers, the arbiter of peace and war, the leader of a political party? No, you will not be that, my friend, because you have not brains enough for such a career."

"Complimentary," laughed the other.

"Not at all complimentary, but very true. We will try another picture. A man about town. A neat little box at Richmond, a yacht at Cowes, a few acres in Scotland, a box at the Opera, a string of hunters at Melton. Would you like to be the glory of the *coulisses*, the admired of Fanny Pettipied, the friend of tenors, and the boon companion of tragedians? Would you like to write for high-class periodicals, and be quoted in smoking-rooms? Would you like to break the tables at Ems, and to flirt with Russian princesses at Wiesbaden? Would you like to know all Turf secrets, and to be one at each stable Vehmgericht in England? Of course you would. But to be all this, you must get into debt about twenty thousand pounds to start with, and see a little more life than you have done yet. I think, after all, that the country gentleman is the career. You can see a little of London society first if you like, and then come back and marry your cousin, after the fashion of three-volume novels."

"Marry your cousin." The thrust was made at last, and

Cyril being off his guard, the delicate rapier of Rupert Dacre came home to the hilt.

He turned crimson. "You talk nonsense, Dacre," said he, half angrily.

"Well," says that gentleman, with a light laugh, "perhaps I do. Let us go in."

And as they went, arm in arm, the big house was no longer brilliant with sunshine, but black and gloomy like the tomb that Cyril had spoken of, while the landscape looked chill and dreary, and the rising night-wind sobbed and sighed with melancholy cadence among the creaking branches of the beech-trees.

It could not be expected that the dinner-table at Matcham would be very brilliant.

Mr. Chatteris sat at one end of it in silence. Even the ceremony of "dressing" had been dispensed with. Miss Kate French, in her deep mourning-dress, looked like Dante's *Beatrice*, while the two young men scarcely spoke save in whispers. There was therefore ample time for Mr. Cyril to think over his friend's advice. What course should he pursue? He thought confusedly during the subdued clinking of glass and tapping of china, upon all the courses that Dacre had suggested, yet found himself constantly recurring to one sentence—"Come back and marry your cousin, after the fashion of three-volume novels." He stole a glance at Kate. She never looked more lovely. Her grief had taken some of the colour from her cheek, but it had given to her face a delicate purity of outline that was wanting to it before; and her grey eyes had grown darker and deeper, and shone with limpid light. Compared to that other picture in Cyril's heart, she was as a queen to a peasant girl. Carry was pretty and coquettish, but Kate, with her superb figure, her delicate hands, her glorious eyes, and her sweet grace of intellect and breeding, was as much beyond her, as a pure, solitary, shining star is beyond a penny catherine-wheel, fizzing with pertinacious twirlings upon a doorlintel.

As Cyril rose to open the door for her, he met her gaze and turned away, while an involuntary pang went through his heart, as he thought of the deed that had banished him from her presence for ever.

The master of the house rose immediately after dinner, and Dacre followed him; while Cyril sat moodily drinking, and picturing all sorts of shapes and scenes in the glowing fire. "I will write to Carry," thought he, "and tell her not to expect me home for a day or two. Poor little thing, she must be anxious;" and he rose to look for pens and paper. "My father's in the library, I cannot go there," thought he; and then remembering that in a little den opening off the hall, and once dignified by the name of Mr. Fred's study, but which was now a simple store-room for guns, dog-whips, fishing-rods, and such like gear, he should find what he sought, he opened the door. As he lit and turned up the reading-lamp on the little table, he heard a sob, and looking up, saw his cousin. She had flung herself into an arm-chair, and was weeping bitterly.

"Kate?"

She rose as if to leave the room, but he put his arms round her and led her back. "What is it, Kate?" said he.

After a moment, the sobs ceased, and Kate, putting his arms away, stood before him, with one hand resting on the edge of the writing table, and said, simply,

"Cyril, I am very unhappy."

"Unhappy! Why, dearest?"

"I don't mean about poor Fred, though I" (she nearly broke down here) "I loved him very dearly; but about you. You are very much changed, Cyril."

"I!"

"Yes. What have you been doing? Why did you quarrel with uncle? and what has kept you so long in London?"

"Three questions at once, Katy!" returned he, with an attempt at a laugh, that was belied by his hangdog face. "I have had no quarrel."

"You have quarrelled, because aunt told me so. What was it about?"

"About a foolish thing I did at college, Kate, dear."

"Oh! I thought it was about your writing for the papers."

Cyril's face was out of the lamplight, but he turned crimson.

"Katy, you are a little fool to make so much of nothing. What are my misdeeds to you?"

"Oh! Cyril, you know that—that" (she grew confused) "that we have been friends since we were children."

"More than friends, darling," said Cyril, overcome by the love in her clear eyes.

And he kissed her on the forehead.

She drew closer to him; and, out of the depth of her innocent and but half-comprehended love, laid her head on his shoulder.

"My darling!" she murmured, "you have some trouble; I know you have. Will you not tell it to me? We are as brother and sister now."

The pressure of her arms; her sweet breath stirring his hair; her loving voice, full of comfort; her delicate intonation, and that exquisite halo of modesty which, even though she was lying on his heart, fenced her round, and put her leagues from him, thrilled the unhappy boy through, as, with sudden knowledge, his heart called out to him, "Here is a woman—beautiful, true, and pure—who loves you, and you have lost her."

For an instant he stood overpowered. He seemed to see his own soul, and to know how he had deceived himself. The knowledge of his own folly struck him like a gigantic wave, and left him speechless. Then he snatched the woman he had lost closer to him, and covered her eyes, and lips, with passionate, burning kisses; then thrusting her from him, with a bitter cry, he fell into a chair, and clutched at his hair with despairing hands.

"Cyril, my boy, are you here? Oh! a thousand pardons!"

It was Rupert Dacre; and, as he stood in the lighted doorway looking in upon the pair, a sneer came into his face.

"She has refused him," thought he.

Cyril sprang up angrily, and, without a word or a look at his cousin, followed Dacre out.

"What is it?"

"Your father wants to see you in the library, my dear boy."

The silky accents jarred upon the young man's ear. How came this stranger to be a messenger between father and son? He turned round, as if to ask the question

but Rupert's hand was upon the lock, and Rupert's smiling eyes upon his face. His heart failed him, the door swung noiselessly on its hinges, and the two entered the library together.

Mr. Saville Chatteris was seated in state at his writing table; and, with a lofty motion of his white, though wrinkled, hand, seemed to suggest an audience. His son, however, full of resentful feelings, which had arisen, he scarcely knew how, walked slowly to the table, and waited for his sentence. It was the same table whereon he had read the letter which had made and marred him; and looking up, he saw Dacre, who was leaning negligently against the fireplace, looking down with an amused air, as though he was a spectator at an agreeable comedy, and was waiting for the curtain to draw up.

"I wish to say a few words to you, sir," began the old man.

Rupert Dacre sat down. The comedy had begun.

"You are now my—my heir," said Mr. Saville Chatteris.

"I never expected, when you left me, to see your face again; but—but matters have turned out differently."

("Very pretty euphuism," thought the spectator, mentally applauding).

"You are now in a different position in life to that which you occupied a few days ago. I need not recapitulate the cause of your temporary absence from home."

("Quite like a despatch! Bravo!" said the spectator's eyes).

"I trust that you have learnt some useful lessons while you have been living on your own resources; and, for my part, I am willing to forget the disgraceful action of which you have been guilty."

Cyril winced and coloured, but did not move. The spectator rubbed his leg gently, and seemed to murmur, "Capitally put, but severe, very severe!"

"I am willing to make you a suitable allowance, until—my—until I—until you succeed to this property—" (Applause from the spectator)—"and shall put no restrictions upon your liberty, that is to say, if you consent to my requirements in other matters."

Cyril bowed. This was better than he expected.

"I have been consulting your friend, Mr. Dacre, who sees more of the young men of the day than I do," continued Mr. Saville Chatteris, with a graceful wave towards the deprecating Rupert, "concerning your wishes, and he is of opinion that you would prefer a London life."

Cyril made a motion of assent.

"I confess that I should prefer that you lived here, but as I have before explained to you, my only wish is to put you in a proper position with the world, as Mr. Chatteris of Matcham, regardless of any feelings I may have toward you as my son."

("A very delicate distinction!" was the mental interjection of the spectator.)

"You will therefore go up to London with your friend Dacre, who has promised me to look after you, and in whose discretion and friendship I place implicit trust."

"You do me great honour, sir," says the spectator—aloud this time.

"I shall allow you eight hundred pounds a year"—(Cyril brightens up)—"which, with your own property, will be enough for you to live upon. But if I do this, you must oblige me by giving up your Radical newspapers, and mixing only in the society of gentlemen. Will you promise this?"

(Telemachus glanced at Mentor, and Mentor's eyes said "Yes!" as plainly as eyes could speak.)

"Yes, I promise that, sir."

"Well, I will rely upon your word; but mind this, if you break it, you shall never come here again, until you come as owner." (The old man's brow flushed as he spoke, but he grew calmer when he saw his son's composed face.) "And now, Cyril, before you go, I wish to speak to you on a private matter."

The spectator, as if the play were over, rose, and bowing with easy grace, left the room.

"I had hoped that your cousin Kate" (Cyril started) "would have been the wife of my—of your poor brother" (and the father uttered the words slowly, as though they were bonds to bind him closer to his surviving son); "but that is all over now. Indeed, perhaps I was wrong,

and she did not love him as I thought she did. I am not rich, Cyril, but the dearest wish of my heart is to provide for my niece's child. I have settled some money of my own upon her, and I believe that I have induced my sister to do the same, but I should not like to see her lose her home. She may marry" (here he glanced at Cyril); "but should she not, I would wish you to promise me that she will always find a home here."

"I promise, sir," and Cyril's hand grasped his father's for the first time since the quarrel.

Saville Chatteris gazed into his son's face, as though he sought for something there.

"You will be marrying one of these days yourself, Cyril," said he, half timidly.

Cyril bit his lips. He thought of the Mantonian domestic circle, and then of Kate. The prize was offered to him, and yet he could not grasp it. He turned dizzy for an instant and could not speak.

"Ah well, time enough to think of that," said Saville Chatteris, dropping his son's hand with a sigh.

Cyril set his teeth, and tried to smile, but the utter hopelessness of his misery came upon him, and he could not.

"Good night, sir, I will attend to your instructions, and start for London to-morrow," and he went out from his father's presence as miserable a wretch as could be found in the three kingdoms.

Mr. Rupert Dacre was in the smoking-room, solacing himself with brandy and soda water, and as he lounged with elevated feet, he seemed to be contemplating the past comedy through the smoke;—indeed, there was an expression of discontent on his face, as though he wished he had waited for the afterpiece.

Kate was in her room, wondering, hoping, doubting, and fearing. Did he love her? He did. Yet no! He left her without a word, but then, of course, Mr. Dacre came. But those kisses! and she blushed in the darkness as she remembered them; those were not the kisses of a brother. "Oh, Cyril, my darling, my darling, I love you!" How sweet it sounded!

— And Cyril's wife was on her knees in a house in Dym Street, praying for her absent husband.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. SEPTIMUS BLAND.

WHEN Mr. Robert Binns heard of the marriage of his beloved and his enemy, he was both sorrowful and indignant. In his vulgar way he loved Miss Manton, and jealousy and love affect vulgar people quite as much as they do those of higher rank. The costermonger who curses in rich and copious Doric at the desertion of Molly Jones, is giving utterance to the same sentiments as those which Mr. Aubrey Vere de Vere pours forth when Lady Clara—prompted, perhaps, by a feeling of remorse for the death of the “peasant boy”—elopes with Auguste Chasse-mari, to the infinite grief of all her relatives. Othello and the deceived cat’s-meat man say very much the same things, only the Moor talks poetry, and the purveyor of horseflesh *kabobs* remarkably bad prose.

Binns, grocer’s assistant and poetaster, was as sore at heart as if he had been heir to a dukedom and descended in a direct line from one of William the Conqueror’s desperadoes. He showed his sorrow in a different way though.

When Lord Lundyfoot was jilted by Miss O’More of Ballymore, his lordship followed his successful rival to Paris, and shot him through the lungs, with aristocratic disregard of the sixth commandment. When Hobbs (of Hobbs and Buffle, cheesemongers, of Fetter Lane) discovered that Miss Sophronia Gusset (of Laburnum Villas, Highgate), had thrown him over, in order to marry young Horace Tomkins of the Stock Exchange, he took to cold brandy-and-water and cigars—a course of treatment which eventually terminated in Whitecross Street; while Mac-Hirdie, the civil engineer, brought an action for breach of promise against his treacherous ladye love, and soothed his wounded feelings by the application of “one farthing damages.”

Binns, however, did none of these things. He wrote poetry—sad stuff most of it was, too, principally about graves, and billows, and blighted hopes, and lonely isles—

but it relieved Binns. The old woman whose duty it was to replenish the brown bottle that contained a stump of a quill pen and some black coagulated mud, presumed to be ink, was astonished at the quantity of that fluid consumed by the melancholy "assistant." Binns was writing night and morning. He elaborated rhymes while he was packing up half-pounds of "moist," and would rush away from the counter at intervals to commit to paper some more than usually brilliant image. Even when going round for orders, his grief would pursue him, and while taking his daily turn at the coffee-mill he would groan in the spirit and compare himself to Ixion, whose woes had been made known to him through a burlesque at the Strand Theatre and an odd volume of Smith's Classical Dictionary.

In the elaboration of his laments, and the attempt to tear this rooted passion from his heart, he was assisted by a friend.

There were "rooms" over the shop, and in those rooms lived Mr. Septimus Bland, reporter for the *Morning Mercury*.

Bland was a tall thin man, with a wiry head of hair, that was always erect and "parting"-less. He was bony, and cadaverous, had a deep resonant voice, wrote short-hand to a miracle, quoted Shakespeare and the poets *ad libitum*, dressed in rusty black, carried his handkerchief in his hat, greasy packages of bread and meat in his coat-tail pockets, was very short-sighted, very unpractical, and the best-hearted, kindest, inoffensive creature that ever vegetated upon three pounds a week.

Poor Bland began life with a pretty Devonshire wife, and a large stock of English literature and inexperience. As a natural consequence, he went to the bad. He fell gradually from the writer in magazines to the reporter for Sunday papers, then to the picker up of odds and ends for the "dailies." His style of magazine-writing was too old-fashioned for the present day—too much like the "Spectator," or an odd page of the "Rambler." Moreover his wife fell ill; and how could he write articles when his wife was dying? The publishers, however, did not care about his wife or anybody's wife; they wanted matter, and if Bland could not supply it, someone else could. By and

by his wife died, and then Bland lived anyhow. He hired a little room in a little street in Hammersmith—a room littered with books bought secondhand at stalls, and the walls covered with pictures from the *Illustrated London News*, pinned or pasted up. He managed for some time to make enough to pay the rent of this place, and when he did not succeed in dining with one of his former friends, would buy himself a chop or steak in some small tavern or eating-house in the city, where he would sit, after satisfying his hunger, and think of Johnson and Garrick, Boswell and Savage, and of the former race of tavern-haunters. Recollecting, perhaps, those happy days when he came home to his wife, and, after a cheerful dinner and chat, some play, or poem or novel would be read aloud by that tender voice that should read no more on earth now; thinking of these things, he would sit in melancholy meditation; until the greasy waiter, looking with unfriendly eyes upon the lanky man with the thin face and the rusty black clothes, who never gave him pence as did the other customers, would bustle about the table, sweep off imaginary crumbs, and otherwise hint that it was time for gentlemen who dined for ninepence to seek some other place to be miserable in.

So Bland would arise, and taking his camlet cloak about him—a cloak that, like its owner, had seen better days—would sally forth and trudge through the rain and mud to Hammersmith. On Sundays, he would—if summer—walk to Bushy Park and rejoice in the song of the birds, and in the sight of the green trees and sloping lawns.

After his appointment to the *Mercury* staff, he naturally became acquainted with many men of decent income and hospitable intentions, and these occasionally asked him to “take a cut of mutton.” These “cuts of mutton” were the only oases in his dreary life; and he was unreasonably happy when he came across them in his pilgrimage. Poor soul, he was like a child—the moment was all in all to him. There was an instinctive refinement about the man that expanded under the influence of soft lights, glittering glass, and snowy cloth. Like many another poor Bohemian, he found the enforced companions of his poverty harder to bear than poverty itself.

The thousand and one little inconveniences and vulgarities which beset the path of a "poor gentleman" galled him to the quick. He could sip a cup of coffee contentedly enough, if such sipping took place in a well-lighted room, with gentlemen seated in it; but he could not drink it with comfort out of a cracked teacup, in a sordid garret, with a harsh-voiced landlady below stairs clamouring with her red-headed brood.

When dining for ninepence in a comfortable eating-house, he forgot his tattered garments, his ragged linen, and his lack of shoe-leather; but at home—where his window looked into a dirty court-yard, and where coarse sights, coarse words, and humanity with the seamy side outwards, surrounded him—he felt his burden heavy to bear. He was no Sybarite, but a man of unhappy sensitiveness, and his lot was cast in very unpleasant places.

When he came into his fortune of three pounds a week, he left his garret at Hammersmith and came nearer civilisation. The room over the grocer's was to let, and as fortune willed it, Bland set up his tent there. He was quiet and unassuming, kind and good tempered, and an acquaintance—I had almost written, friendship—had sprung up between the literary hack and the aspiring and love-lorn Binns.

Bland had heard the whole history of the Carry-cum-Chatteris affair, of course, and would sit for hours listening with sad amusement to the "assistant's" rhapsodies.

Binns had lurked about Dym Street for a day or two after the ceremony, in the hope of seeing his lost love once again; and after two days' prowling, had heard the tidings of Cyril's flight. Bursting with the news, he hurried home and rushed into his friend's chamber.

"Mr. Bland! Mr. Bland! he's left her!"

"God bless me!—whom?" cries the astonished Bland, laying down his book.

"Carry! That scoundrel has deserted her. He went away the morning of the wedding, and has never come back."

"Never come back!"

"No; and Mrs. Manton's furious, and She's crying fit to break her heart. God b-b-bless her!"

"Sit down, my dear Bob. Now, don't go on like that. Bless the boy! Here, take some water."

And poor Bland bustled about in an agony of soft-heartedness.

"It's some plot—some cowardly plot to deceive her; I know it is. I knew no good would come of it. What did she want with a swell?" cries the rejected one, striking the table in his energy of love and despair.

"Perhaps it is a mistake."

"Mistake! Not it; it's no mistake. The coward! He's left her; that's what he's done."

"But why should he leave her? What is his reason?"

"They said something about a telegram come up from the *Mercury* office. Just a blind, I'll be bound."

"From the *Mercury* office! They would never telegraph from the office. Perhaps some of his friends want him."

"Friends! He ain't got no friends—I mean, any friends. I believe he's just a swindler and a scoundrel. He's gone and deceived the poor girl. It serves that old cat right for plotting and contriving. Oh! I hate her, and him, and everyone. I am the most miserable wretch on earth."

And Binns laid his head on the table, and gave vent to his vulgar sorrow.

"My dear Robert, calm yourself. You are very wrong to go on like this; you are indeed."

"Oh! It's all very fine for you, Mr. Bland; but when a fellow's heart's broken it's—boo-boo—a hard thing to mend again."

Bland looked down upon the squab figure of the poor lad with pitying face. After a pause, he laid his hand gently on his shoulder.

"Bob, listen to me a moment."

Bob raised his tousled head.

"What made Miss Manton fall in love with Mr. Chatteris?"

"What! Why, his rings and chains, and scented handkerchiefs, and nimity-pimity ways, I suppose."

"If you do suppose so, she is not worth thinking about."

"No; it wasn't that," exclaims Binns, with sudden desperate energy of self-condemnation. "It was because he's a gentleman, and I'm only a cad. He is clever—curse him—and I ain't; I know that. Why should she

love me, a lout that wears a white apron, and can't talk English? She's an angel, and I ain't worthy to kiss her shoe leather; but I love her! Oh! Mr. Bland, I'd die to-morrow if I could save her a moment's pain."

"Then why not make yourself worthy of her?"

"Worthy of another man's wife!"

"I do not speak of that. You say that you love a woman that is above you; that she despises you because you are less clever and less polished than the man she has married. She can never be anything to you now; but you have it in your power to make yourself worthy of her love for all that. I know Mr. Chatteris. He may be more refined—he can hardly help being so—but he has not half your natural talents"—Binns gasped—"and I am sure he has not got your good heart. I do not tell you this to flatter you, my boy, but because I want to see you make a name in that world where I have fought so long and failed so often."

"Make a name! The name of Binns!"

"As good as many that shine bright in the list of England's heroes. Your name is nothing; your person is nothing; it is your heart that the world wants to see. If you have noble thoughts, earnest aspirations, and honest faith, the world will not care a jot for your name or birth. No!" cries Bland, rising, his eyes dilating, and his sonorous voice ringing through the sordid chamber, "genius is of no nation, of no name, of no person! It is as the mighty wind that sweeps over the ocean, carrying good or evil on its wings, men know not whence it comes, but they bow before its breath. You are a man; speak out a man's thoughts to men, and they will listen to you. The world is hollow, false, and selfish, but Genius comes with scorn in his clear eyes, power in his upraised hand, and heaven's truth upon his lips, and the base world, like a hound that meets his master, crawls to his kingly feet in mute submission."

There was silence for a moment after this outburst. Bland had dropped into his chair, and, with eyes fixed upon the fire, seemed to be thinking of days gone by, when, perhaps, he thought that the mantle of heaven's messenger had fallen upon *his* shoulders, and when he had

hoped that the world would crawl to *his* feet, now, alas! blistered and weary with tedious travel.

Binns sat meditative; his eyes were sparkling, his chest heaving; the earnest purpose in his face made one forget his scorbatic cheeks and his ill-fitting coat. Had Carry seen him then she might not have thought him so very "vulgar."

At last he spoke.

"How am I to do it?" said he, in a low voice.

Bland roused himself.

"It is not an easy task," said he, sadly. "You have much to learn; much to forget. Fame is not won by dallying or repining. You must work for her, toil for her, bleed for her; and then, perhaps, just as she stretches forth the crown, the leaves crumble to dust beneath your trembling fingers, and the withered wreath drops upon a tomb."

"But how to begin?"

"Work, boy, work. Give up writing, and read. Study men, study life, study nature. You are young, you have energies, and industry."

"And these?" asked Binns, pointing to a mass of papers—his poems—that were piled upon a broken chair. "Shall I burn them?"

"No; but put them away and read them six months hence. Poetry is always the first outbreak of young minds; you were made to be a worker, not a dreamer. There is poetry in work, lad, if you can find it; ay, more than in a sonnet to a sunset or a flower. There will be plenty for men to do in the future. The people are finding out that they are men, not 'masses,' and they who would lead them must prove themselves to be worthy leaders of men. Go out to them and show them a man's heart; there are not many such to be seen nowadays. You sit here with your grocer's apron round your waist, and dream of glorious suns, burning skies, waving trees, and plashing streams. Turn away your eyes from the beauties of valley, field, and river, and look into the face of the careworn, sickly labourer who passes you in the streets. He is unpleasant to look upon; his coat is ragged, his hands dirty, his face pale and begrimed with the sweat and dust of his daily

fight for bread; yet I tell you that his life is a poem worthier to write and hear than all the visions of your heated fancy. It is a poem that, if you can interpret to men correctly, they will hail you as a poet great as Æschylus. The poetry of the age is work and usefulness. It walks, runs, throbs beside and around you. Roll up your apron and go out and seek it; you will find it ready to your hand; no need to dream of palm islands, or groves of myrtles. We do not want a poet to teach us that there is glory in the star, or perfume in the flower; we want a man, with a man's heart, who can show us the poetry in our own lives and our own nature.—There, I have done. You have made me forget that I am, too, but a dreamer, though I might have done some service once."

And Bland's voice sank, and his head fell upon his breast.

The scrubby little grocer's apprentice rose softly, and turned to quit the room. As he reached the door, his friend spoke again, in an altered tone.

"One word before you go. If, in the future, you make yourself a name and place, and you find that this man has deceived and abandoned the woman you love, will you protect and guard her?"

"I will, by ——!" said Binns.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING INQUIRIES.

WHEN the dog-cart deposited Dacre and Cyril at the Kirkminster Junction Railway Station, they found Mr. Robert Calverly walking up and down the platform, with his brown hands deep in the pockets of his grey shooting-coat, and a cigar between his lips.

"How do you do, Mr. Dacre!"

"Going up to town, Bob?"

It was a peculiarity of the young Australian's that he was the sort of man that one involuntarily addresses by his Christian name. There are some men who are speci-

ally constituted to be called by diminutives, and this was one of them. He was so brown, honest, frank, and impetuous that the chances were just fifty to one that you slapped him on the back after twenty minutes' acquaintance, and called him "Bob" ever afterwards.

"Yes," says Bob, "I want to order some things."

"Then we'll all go together. This is Mr. Cyril Chat-teris, of Matcham."

After the usual bowing ceremony had been gone through, Bob Calverly took a prolonged side look at Cyril. This was the man, then, whom Dacre had hinted that Kate loved. Bob saw nothing loveable in him. The clear cut features, and the delicate hands were no charms in the Australian's eyes; and he looked in vain for a certain frankness of eye, and fearlessness of aspect, that he was wont to find in men whom he called "friends."

Cyril, however, was remarkably agreeable, and, having preserved a decent melancholy for some fifty miles, began to brighten up; and, when the trio got out at Swindelton for incidental refreshments, the talk was fast and furious.

Bob was enraptured at the barrack life of Kirkminster; and his Australian impressions of the British army not being the best in the world, he was proportionately inclined to praise the *bonhomie*, good fellowship, and gentlemanly bearing of the majority of the men in the —th.

"The best fellows I ever met in my life!" said he, with enthusiasm.

"Yes," returned Dacre. "There is no medium in the service. A man is either At Lloyd's, or 'snob,' stock, lock, and barrel."

"Well, I've known men who were neither," put in Cyril.

"Possible, but not probable. Are you sure that you really knew them? A dinner at the 'Rag' or a luncheon at Richmond doesn't make you *know* a man, you know."

Cyril reddened, Mentor was arrogating too much to himself.

"The 'British soldier,' as you call him, has a fine time of it," put in Bob, who detected the sting in Dacre's reply, and was anxious to change the conversation. "He seems to me to live like a fighting cock, with books, gymnasiums, and all sorts of things."

"Yes," returns the sententious Rupert, shifting his railway rug more comfortably over his legs. "He lives far too well. The Government makes a great mistake in pampering up her food for powder. I believe in the old *régime*, when the British soldier had his life made such a curse to him that he fought like a fiend to get rid of it."

Bob stared aghast, and Rupert having watched the effect produced by his nonsense upon the unsophisticated one, lit a cigar and smoked in calm defiance of the bye-laws.

"What strange things you say, Rupert," laughs Cyril, "you'll make Mr. Calverly believe that English government officials are the hardest-hearted fellows in Europe."

"Or the softest headed."

Bob laughed cheerily. "Chaff away, you fellows, don't mind me. I've stood plenty of chaff in my life."

"How long have you left Australia?" says Cyril.

"Oh, about twelve months. Wish I was back there again."

"Wish you were back?"

"Yes, I'd rather be riding a good horse after stock over the plains, than dawdling about London drawing-rooms."

"All you Australian fellows are always talking about 'riding after stock.' I remember that fellow, Darling Downs, who used to give those big feeds in Kensington Gore—he was always talking about stock, and stations, and wild cattle, and bushfires, and riding one hundred miles a day for six weeks."

"Ah, that sort of thing is very easy to talk," says Bob, "but could he ride?"

"Oh yes, he could ride fast enough," says Dacre, "the ugliest seat, and the lightest hand of any man I knew."

"That's a different thing to sitting a buckjumper."

"Pooh, I'll find you a boy out of any hunting stables in England that will sit the worst buckjumper ever foaled," says Cyril.

And they went off into a discussion upon the difference between bucking and plunging, and English and colonial saddles, and post-and-rail fences, and grass country, and hunting in the shires, and all the Australian horse-talk

that arises between English riding men and sojourners from that land of freedom. By and by the conversation turned upon other topics, and after a brief description of Bourke Street and a horse bazaar, Bob waxed eloquent, and entertained them for an hour with an account of a certain cattle muster on the Warrego, in which he and a stockman named Dick took a prominent part. Just as he came to the part where an old bull who, having lagged behind, (the custom of old bulls), was about to charge Dick's horse, who had put his foot in a crab hole, and Dick sprang up, all dusty from earth, and with a tremendous crack of his stock-whip, challenged his antagonist to "come on," the train ran into London Bridge Station, and the journey was at an end.

"Where do you put up, Bob?" says Dacre.

"At Limmer's."

"You must come and see me, old fellow; 37 Brook Street is my humble roof."

"Delighted!"

"I tell you what, come up next Wednesday at eight o'clock, and I'll have a few fellows to meet you."

"I think Ponsonby and Hethrington will be up from Kirkminster on Thursday."

"Then I'll leave a note for them at the 'Rag,' and we'll fix it for Friday."

"All right, old fellow."

And the Australian departed in a hansom for Limmer's.

"You had better come with me," says Dacre to Cyril.

"We will dine together and talk over matters."

"Thanks, but I want to go up to my old lodgings to-night."

"Oh, to-morrow will do for that."

"Yes, I know—but—No, I think I must go to-night."

"By the way, where *are* your lodgings. You were so close, when you were under the paternal cloud, that I never could find out where you lived."

"I! oh nonsense. I lived in—in—in South Audley Street," says Cyril at a venture, and the moment he had said it he regretted that he had not spoken the truth. What did it matter?

"Oh, indeed! Well then, if you won't come, good-bye

till Friday. Go down to the *Mercury* office, Fleet Street, cabby!"

As Cyril went home, he thought of many things. Of his new prospects, of his pledge concerning the Radical newspapers, of Carry and Mrs. Manton—then he thought of Kate. They had parted without an explanation. She had been taken by surprise at his sudden departure, and though her wistful eyes had seemed to ask for some reference to those few moments in the study, he had given none.

"What am I to tell her?" thought he, "and what am I to say to Carry?"

He had not made up his mind upon either point, when the cab drew up at his wife's house, and he was "at home" once more.

"Good gracious! if it isn't Mr. Cyril!" cried Maria Jane.

Mrs. Manton bustled out. "Oh, so you've come back at last! Upon my word this is nice goings on. A fortnight away from your wife, and not so much as a letter."

He put her aside, and went into the parlour.

"Where is she?"

"Where is she? Much you care, I expect. Why, gone down to the *Mercury* office to ask after you, Mr. Cyril Chatteris."

"To the *Mercury* office! She might have waited until I wrote."

"Waited, oh yes! How did we know you were ever coming back again? Wait indeed!"

Even as she spoke there was a hurried tread in the passage. Carry had seen the cab draw up at the house, and leaving the arm of a tall thin man in rusty black who had escorted her home, ran up the steps, pushed past the portmanteau-laden cabby, burst open the door and flung herself into her husband's arms.

"Cyril, Cyril, my darling! you have come back again."

"Yes, and a nice time he's been about it," ejaculates the angry mother.

"Oh, Cyril, I have heard all about it at the office. I am so sorry."

"All about what?"

"About your brother's death."

Who could have told her? How did she know? and how much? He grew pale with anger and fear.

"Your brother's death!" exclaims Mrs. Manton, who seemed to recognise the fact of Cyril's black clothes for the first time. "Why, that Lieutenant Chatteris that the newspaper spoke about wasn't your brother, was he? Carry and me saw the account of the steeplechase in the *Tizer*, but we never thought as how it was your brother."

The decisive moment had come at last. He must confess or deny, now or never. Carry had half withdrawn herself from his arms, and was looking up into his face in blank amazement. He nerved himself for a bold stroke. Catching his wife in his arms, he drew himself up and pointed to the door.

"Will you have the goodness to leave me alone with my wife, Madam."

Mrs. Manton stared, but the shock of the discovery had shaken her nerves. She had believed Cyril to be "well off," but Mr. Chatteris, the brother of a lieutenant of dragoons, and the son of a wealthy landed proprietor, was a very different person to the son-in-law she had expected. She cast one wrathful amazed look upon the flashing eyes and outstretched finger of her daughter's husband, and then with a vicious toss of her cap-ribbons, slammed the door upon her retreating figure, and the pair were alone together.

"Sit down, my darling," says Cyril, after a moment's pause. "I want to tell you something."

* * * * *

As Bland was coming down the stair of the dingy office in Fleet Street, the day after his conversation with Binns, he was struck by the somewhat unusual appearance of a pretty woman in the freshest of autumn walking toilettes, gazing disconsolately at the numerous doors, stairs, and windows of that uncomfortable pile of buildings.

"Can I assist you in any way, madam?" asked he, with a bow.

"Oh yes, sir; if you would be so good as to tell me where I can find Mr. Chatteris?"

Mr. Chatteris! Bland took another look at the timid

figure. Could this be the "Carry" he had heard so much about?

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mrs. Chatteris?"

"Yes," with such a blush that it almost made Bland blush too.

"I am afraid that he is not here," said he, "I will ask though."

It was a curious question to put, but the tall gentleman looked so kind and good that Carry ventured to put it.

"Do you know where he is, sir?"

"No, my dear; but I will ask if anybody knows."

"He got a telegram from the office a fortnight ago, and he has not come back since."

This statement tallied strangely with Binns's story, and the shabby reporter shook his head sorrowfully.

"Wait here one moment, Mrs. Chatteris, and I will go and ask about it."

A hansom cab had just driven up to the door, and Mr. Rupert Dacre alighting therefrom, had caught the last sentence. Mrs. Chatteris! Did he hear aright? Bland had seen the private secretary of Lord Nantwich before, and had seen him with Cyril too.

"Excuse me, Mr. Dacre, but a lady is here asking for Mr. Chatteris. Do you know where he is?"

"He came up to town with me this morning. He was obliged to go down into the country to attend his brother's funeral."

Carry heard, and her suspicions of the past week seemed cruel.

"Thank you, sir," said she to Bland, "I will go home."

"Will you allow me to walk with you, madam?" says Bland.

She looked up into the kindly haggard face, and saw nothing but courtesy and pity there.

"I shall be very glad if you will," said she.

Mr. Rupert Dacre pausing on the stair head, saw the pair go away together.

"Why, that is the little girl I saw Cyril speak to once before! Mrs. Chatteris—'um? a *nom de convenance* I suppose. He can't have married her, surely. What a sly young dog it is. I must find out about 'Mrs. Chatteris.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. MANTON "SEES HER WAY."

"CARRY, I want to tell you something!"

He hardly knew, though, how to tell it. It is not a pleasant task—that of telling the woman you have married that you are ashamed of her family, if not of herself, and many a better man than Cyril Chatteris would have felt his eloquence fail him at such a juncture.

He made a bold push for it, however. He had plunged into the flood, and must sink or swim. His heart half failed him when he looked at his wife's frightened eyes, from which the love-light had not died out—yet.

"Carry, I have done a very foolish thing."

"How?"

"I should have written to my father before I married you."

The little woman pouted. It *did* seem hard that his first sentence to her should be one of regret.

"Is he angry with you, dear?"

"He knows nothing."

"Oh, Cyril, have you not told him?"

A vague terror possessed her as she asked the question. A marriage was not a thing to be concealed.

"Listen to me, darling. The telegram that called me from you"—he kissed her, Judas-like, at the memory—"contained news of my brother's accident. He was killed in a steeplechase, and I only reached home to see him buried. The house was in confusion, and my father was overcome with grief. What could I do?"

She had not yet arrived at the distrustful stage. In love, one believes everything. Yet the vague terror was there still.

"But you *will* tell him, Cyril?"

"Of course. It will be the happiest moment of my life"—how barren the hackneyed sentiment sounded!—"when I can take you home with me. But, for a time, it is best that things rest as they are."

She turned her face to his, and kissed him.

"As you please, dear."

"You see, Carry," he stammered, "that—that I am entirely dependent on my father, and that, if I should give him cause to quarrel with me, I might be left penniless. So—so our marriage should be—at least it is best for the present—and—and" (he rushed at the mental fence)—"we shall not love each other the less, shall we?"

What need for me to write the answer? It was the strongest argument he had used yet, and was effectual, of course.

"What am I to tell my mother?" she asked, after a pause.

He scarcely knew what to answer.

"Tell her nothing," said he.

"Oh, Cyril!"

"Well, what *would* you tell her—that I shall be a beggar if my father hears that I have married her daughter? The reason is a good one, I admit!" and he laughed bitterly.

"But she must know."

"Well, tell her that I am *not* the brother of the Lieutenant Chatteris you spoke of."

"But that would be a lie!"

He looked down upon her crimsoned face. She would not lie for him yet. The scruple struck him as so feeble a one that he laughed involuntarily.

"You little goose, did you think I meant it? Tell her what you please, my darling. I do not suppose that she can harm us."

Her lissom fingers, white and slender enough, played with the button of his coat nervously.

"You know, she thought—she hoped—that you were well off, and that she could give up keeping lodgings, and come and live with us."

Cyril grew hot with shame and anger. Did she hope so indeed! Her hopes would be frustrated then. And yet it was natural enough. He married the girl openly, and the mother, of course, had a claim on him. But the matter might be "arranged." He had heard of such "arrangements." He had laughed, with others of his class, at the burdens that other men bore. He had often

given his opinion upon the restraint of marriage, and the possibility of some pleasant "arrangement" by which one could taste the sweet without the bitter. At college he had been considered rather a "man of the world"—a cool, calculating, easy-mannered materialist, who snapped social ties like withes; and it was his pride to be considered so. But now the real, living, actual mother-in-law was before him, large and irrepressible. How could he deal with her? His wife, too? He loved her certainly, but it was a love that made him think for a moment that, had she not been his wife, he could have loved her more. Could the matter be "arranged?" He might take her away from the mother, and bury her in some cottage, some *villa d'oro* where birds, flowers, trees, and sunshine should make up for the loss of name and place. Yet, when he looked at her, he shuddered at his own thoughts. Love's torch was burning still, and he could not hint at a simulated dishonour.

"If it was not for the mother, we could go and live quietly somewhere," he thought. Surely in time he might get rid of her. At present it was simply impossible.

He rose with a sigh.

"Of course she will live with us, my darling. We must ask her, though, to put up with poverty, for I am not rich, you know."

Carry laughed. She measured wealth by watch chains, and rings, and shining boots, and coats by Poole.

"You are rich enough for me, Cyril. We will live as happy as—as—"

"As the Prince and Princess in the fairy tales! But I am an enchanted Prince, you know, condemned to seem like a monster in my darling's eyes, because I cannot proclaim her Princess!"

She laid her head on his breast. The action touched him, it was so tenderly confident.

"God bless you, my darling! I will try and make you happy."

And, for the moment, he believed he meant it.

So the household went on as usual. Mrs. Manton, indignant at the assumption of her authority, did not appear until breakfast the next morning; and, when she

did appear, acted "la grande dame" with an affectation of distant politeness, that made Carry blush and Cyril laugh.

He was in better humour now. Having got over the first difficulty—the telling his wife—he was prepared to do battle with the mother-in-law. Moreover, in the halcyon days of marriage, one is apt to look at the world through rose-tinted glass, and to trust to Fortune for a settlement of unpleasant matters. He informed Mrs. Manton that he should take no steps at present with regard to "moving!"

"I must look out for a house somewhere," said he; "and, in the meantime, Carry and I had better stop here."

The Burden bowed haughtily.

"Look here, Mrs. Manton," said he, "don't be annoyed at what I said last night. I had just returned from a long journey, and was fatigued and angry."

The lady tossed her head.

"Very well, Mr. Chatteris. If you apologise, that's enough. Though I must say that, to turn a Lady out of her own Apartments wasn't considered manners when I was a gal!"

"My dear madam, I never intended any disrespect"—how the word stuck in his throat!—"but, you see, that—in fact—that I was tired, and perhaps wrong and hasty."

"Quite enough, sir! And may I ask where you and my daughter intend to reside?"

Cyril was getting warm again.

"Reside! why here, of course! unless you prefer us to go elsewhere."

How he hoped that she would say "Yes!"

"Prefer! My preferences are not to be consulted. I only look to my child's comfort and happiness. Oh, Mr. Cyril, you'll make her a good husband, won't you. She's all that's left to me now!"

The red face grew redder, and the eyes seemed about to overflow. How hideously like her daughter the mother looked.

"I will do my best, of course. But do be reasonable; you know I am not rich, and must make the best of things for a little time. I have only a small allowance from my father, and depend in a great measure upon my own

exertions. The fact is, that my father is given to prejudices, and if he knew that I had married a pers—a lady in your daughter's position, he would be very much annoyed, and would probably cut off my allowance altogether."

"But you're the eldest son now?"

"That does not do me any good. The prop—the est—the moneys I may have are entirely dependent on my father's will. If he quarrels with me I shall get nothing."

This was the best thing he could have said. Madam Manton was a woman of the world, and she saw, or thought she saw, the position of things at a glance.

Cyril was the son of a rich old gentleman, who would "cut him off" with a shilling if he disobeyed or displeased him. In time he would succeed to property, and then his wife and mother-in-law would partake of his luxury. But in the meantime the marriage must be "kept dark." She could watch over her daughter well enough. No fear that any denial of marriage should take place while *she* kept watch and ward. Cyril, too, must be humoured. If he was tried beyond his powers of endurance, he might tell his father, and so blight his own and his wife's hopes for ever. She took her cue at once.

"My poor boy! well, you shall not suffer from me. You have married my Carry out of love, and you shan't suffer for it. No! not if I works my fingers to the bone!"

The sentiment was excellent, but, as Cyril inwardly remarked, the grammar was execrable.

"There is no need to do that. I can work for her as well as you can. The only thing I wish is, that you will keep the fact of our marriage as quiet as possible."

"Rely on me, my dear boy, rely on me."

Carry, fearful of the result of the interview, had been weeping silently in another chamber. She heard the parlour door open, and ran to meet her mother.

"What did he say, mother?"

"Say! What should he say? Ugh, you little fool! Dry your eyes, and go and talk to him."

CHAPTER IX.

AN AFTERNOON'S STROLL.

MR. ROBERT CALVERLY lived in state at Limmer's. He had plenty of money, and was not chary in the spending of it. To the young Australian, London and its delights were new and fresh. His previous experience of town life had been confined to Bourke and Collins Streets. He had dined at the *Café*, and lounged in at the Royal; he had "done the block" in Collins Street from three to four; had played billiards, drunk sherry and bitters at Scotts' at noonday, looked in at Kirk's, ridden to hounds with the M.H.C., bet his humble "pony" on the Melbourne Cup, and believed that the Maribyrnong stud was the finest in the world.

He had played unlimited loo and drunk unlimited "whisky-hot" at Hamilton; and was not ignorant of the charms of whist in a Ballarat railway carriage. But his knowledge of "fast" life stopped at the unsavoury casinos of Bourke Street; and the height of his dissipation had been an oyster supper after the theatre, with the concomitants of parting porters at early hotels.

He was not much better or much worse than others of his species; and, apart from a few youthful revels with his bush friends, knew little of the night side of humanity.

London, with its parks, its clubs, its theatres, its dancing-rooms, and music-halls, seemed a paradise of delight, radiant and full of splendour. He saw more pretty women and fine horses during one hour's lounging "over the rails," than he could have met with in a month of Victorian travel; while the multitude of picture-galleries, exhibitions, libraries, and concerts, overwhelmed him.

He partook of the heat and hurry of pleasure seeking, and thrown, a young and wealthy Adam, into what seemed a new Eden, he was bent on exploring its beauties to the utmost. Tailors, jewellers, and job-masters marked him for a prey, and "Mr. Calverly's bell" was ringing eternally.

Yet, with all his extravagance, he was not plucked so

cleanly as many a pigeon who had been hatched in the sacred dovecote of the "little village." His natural shrewdness stood him in good stead, and some solid foundation of sound principle and manly feeling saved his social house from falling beneath the blasts of evil example and evil communication.

He was not in such bad case as he appeared to be; and though the original three thousand pounds melted like snow before the fierce heat of London dissipation, were there not sheep and oxen at Ballarat, and subservient "home agents" enough to minister to his needs?

He had begun, however, to feel the effects of his new mode of life. His pulse was not so regular. He no longer felt an inclination to rise at unearthly hours, and to astonish sleepy grooms and drowsy stable-boys by "clapping the saddle on his mare," and taking constitutional gallops in the early dawn. He looked upon early rising with distaste, and had begun to order brandies and sodas before breakfast.

Yet he could "see out" any of his friends at a supper or a "beating round;" and the young *attachés* and runners-up from Aldershot confessed with sighs of envy that he always looked fresher than they did after a night of such amusements.

Mr. Rupert Dacre had taken him under his wing, and, though careful not to compromise his own reputation by too late hours at unholy places, had nevertheless showed his *protégé* as much or more of "life" than he expected. Dacre assumed the paternal and *blasé* manner so frequent among men of his class, and would permit himself to be drawn into a "night's fun" with the air of a man who sacrifices his personal comfort at the shrine of friendship. He deprecated all revelry with such grave philosophy, that the young men regarded it as a personal favour to themselves if "Dacre" accompanied them; and a youngster, red-eyed and pale from a desperate struggle with his constitution, would say with a careless air, but with evident pride, "Dacre and I were at the opera last night, and went over to Tom's, or Dick's, or Harry's. Stopped up till three this morning, by Jove! Must have a B. and S." While, to be admitted to the Eleusinian mysteries

of a dinner in Brook Street was considered an honour equal to the Golden Fleece, or the Order of the Garter.

The astute secretary to Lord Nantwich was fully alive to the social importance of acquaintances, and made a point of never admitting any but the "best men" to his intimacy.

"Rather slow, some of them, of course," he would say to his cronies, "but then, you know, they are useful."

"As for youngsters," (by which term the young man included all humanity below his own age, and some few above it), "they are simply nuisances. They can't talk, they have no influence, they are always in scrapes, and always want to borrow money."

He carefully, however, made two exceptions—Bob Calverly and Cyril. These two came under the category of cat's paws, and he was only waiting till the chestnuts were nicely browned to make use of their friendship. He had known Cyril from boyhood, and though he never took much notice of him while a younger son, he was now a man to be cultivated. Bob Calverly, too, was a useful fellow. He had money and generosity; and his uncle kept a very fair house, and a reasonable pack of hounds. Casting up their virtues upon the credit side of their ledger, Mr. Dacre honoured them with his friendship.

On Friday afternoon he came down to Limmer's and found Bob busily writing a letter to his father.

"Writing by the mail? Good boy! I just looked in to remind you that we dine at eight. I am afraid the party will be a little larger than I expected. I've asked old Quantox, of the 'Isthmian,' and Vanderbank, the artist. There will be nine or ten of us altogether."

"Is that Quantox the manager?"

"Yes; a most amusing old fellow. He tells the most preposterous stories you ever heard in your life. By the way, how did you get home from Saltoun's last night?"

"Came home with Welterwate in a hansom, and then went down to Cannon's and played billiards."

"I say, young Copperfield, you're going it! You must take care, Master Bob."

"Oh, I'm all right."

"Glad to hear it. No, thank you, I won't smoke. I'm

just going for a stroll. I have accomplished my arduous duties for one day."

"You're a lucky fellow, Dacre," says Bob.

"I am the hardest worked and the worst paid secretary in London. Ah, well! It's destiny, I suppose. Oh, for an Australian sheep-station, with a London agent! *You* are the lucky fellow."

"Stations are not what they used to be, my dear fellow."

"Nothing is. Even creditors are worse than in the brave days when I was twenty-one."

Bob laughed.

"You can't be so very old now."

"'Young in years, but old in care.' Capital sentiment for a modern melodrama, that! No one would know that it was a plagiarism from Byron."

This remark was lost upon Bob, who laughed nevertheless, as men do when they don't understand a joke.

"Well, you won't come out? Then good-bye until dinner."

Mr. Dacre was somewhat thoughtful as he walked slowly onwards. Perhaps it was business that worried him—the thoughts of that pile of unread letters addressed to "R.H. Lord Nantwich, Sec. Foreign Affairs," which were so neatly stacked upon his writing-table, perhaps annoyed him; or perhaps he was wondering what the result of the appointment of the Hon. George Whitecross as Envoy-Extraordinary to the Court of Persia would effect. The cares of state would sit heavily on the elegant secretary. He affected the overworked official, and would smile languidly, and pass his hand wearily across his brow, when office matters were touched upon in general society.

But it was not the state of Europe, or the policy of the Government that gave Mr. Dacre cause for uneasiness; his thoughts were busy with his own private affairs. The righteous Rupert had "expenses." He was not in debt, but he was spending every shilling of his income. The question of money had long been an obtrusive one with him.

"If I only had a few thousands a year more," he would say, "I should be the luckiest fellow alive. It is strange

that men who know how to use money never get any, and fellows whose only notion of finance is to play ducks and drakes with sovereigns, always have plenty. I suppose my venerable godfather, the Bishop of Swillborough, would call it a special dispensation of Providence!"

He was meditating upon this important question with such intensity of study, that he trod on the skirt of a lady's dress. His hat was off in an instant.

The lady turned round at his murmured apology, and Rupert recognised "Mrs. Chatteris." They were in Oxford Street, and she was going westward.

"By Jove! the little girl that came to the *Mercury* after Cyril!—Mrs. Chatteris, eh?"

He stood gazing at the dainty figure for a few moments, and then slowly followed it.

At Holles Street he was close behind her, so close, indeed, that she turned to look at him.

There was no consciousness in her eyes. When at the *Mercury* office, she had been too much occupied with the fate of her husband to pay much attention to the appearance of the rapidly passing Dacre.

He looked at her meaningly.

She coloured and turned away her head.

"Um! I suppose I am mistaken. Yet she can't be the cub's wife. The thing is absurd."

He fell back a little.

Carry turned down into Dym Street. As she knocked at the door of the Mantonian domicile, Dacre passed her again.

"No. 75. Looks like a lodging house! Cyril said he lived in Audley Street. I suppose this girl is a governess or an actress—yet no, she can't be the last. I know all the women this side of the water, and if she was 'over the way' she should be going out, not coming home. It's past five now. The place is too far west for that. Perhaps she is 'respectable, etc.,' and the young donkey has honourable intentions. I must find out."

A grocer's shop was at the corner. A cheap grocer's. A shop radiant with brilliant labels, and enticing scrolls, succulent with butter in kegs, and sticky with moist sugar in bags; oozing over with honey, and rich in various

and wonderfully compounded "teas." Dacre walked in.

A touzled-headed young man was writing in a sort of wooden cage in a corner, while another turned a coffee mill wearily.

"Did you send up those things to No. 75?" asked Mr. Dacre.

"To Mrs. Manton's?" asked the man at the wheel, stopping his turning delightedly.

"Yes!"

The touzled-headed one in the cage was consulted, and upon hearing the name "Manton's" left his writing and came forward, scowling at Lord Nantwich's private secretary with much energy.

The easy demeanour of that gentleman, however, seemed to quiet him, for he said, civilly enough,

"There has been nothing sent to-day, sir."

"Dear me, it is very strange." (He drew his bow at a venture.) "Mr. Chatteris told me this morning that he had ordered some smoked tongues to be sent up."

The touzled-headed youth crimsoned at the mentioned name.

"Mr. Chatteris never comes here," said he, roughly.

"Ah, some mistake; lower down the street. Excuse me," and he was gone.

"Who's that swell, Bob?" asked the man at the wheel, resuming his duties with greater weariness than before.

"I don't know," returned the other, "some of *his* friends, I suppose."

"Rather a handsome cove, too," returned the weary one; "regular 'out and outer' I should say."

The "out and outer" smiled pleasantly as he walked briskly home.

"Mrs. Manton, eh? Manton—Manton. Any relation to the gunmaker I wonder? And Chatteris evidently is known in the neighbourhood—lives at the house I should say. I wonder if they have room for another lodger." He laughed pleasantly at the thought and, upon reaching Brook Street, was so affable and gay, that Harris, his servant, was quite put out of his humour, and imagined that all sorts of things had happened.

CHAPTER X.

A QUIET DINNER IN BROOK STREET.

WHEN Bob Calverly reached Brook Street he found a large party assembled. Ponsonby was there, ruddier than ever; Hethrington, with his arm still a little stiff from the effects of that "roll over" at the fence on the memorable steeplechase day; Algernon Pierrepont, and Welterwate of the Blues, were there; so was young Danby Miniver of the F.O., and his chum Lord Augustus Fitz-Frederick; Quantox, the manager of the Isthmian, and Vanderbank, the artist; Maxwell Hurst, the popular novelist, chatted with Fleem the critic; while Cyril Chatteris was deep in political discussion with Captain Leamington, a Queen's messenger, and the best compounder of *soup à la bisque* in Europe.

Dacre was in his element.

"Come along, gentlemen! No ceremony under my Ishmaelish tent. Dinner is in the next room. Calverly, you know Ponsonby, of course. Welter, this is a friend of mine, Mr. Calverly. Pierrepont, you know Mr. Calverly's uncle, Sir Valentine Yoicks—hunts Loamshire. Don't you remember that great day when you and old Doublethong were alone in the last field! Hurst, they say that you are going to write something about Australia in your next novel. Take care, or Calverly will bowl you out in your facts, old fellow. Harris, soup to Mr. Fleem. That sherry is part of old Trulliber's stock, Quantox; don't be afraid of it."

"Did you ever taste the Greek wine, fined with milk?" asked Hurst.

"Never. I hate 'fined' wines. I bought some crusted port once, many years ago, and a friend of mine analysed a bottle of it, and pronounced it to be rectified spirit, cognac, brandy, rough cider, and sloe juice, made at a cost of sixteen shillings a gallon."

Calverly looked at the speaker.

It was Quantox, the manager, a man of no particular nation, no particular accent, no particular relations, and no particular virtues.

"Who is he?" asked Ponsonby.

"Old Quantox. Keeps the best cellar in London, and tells the most impossible stories. Dacre will draw him out directly."

"The worst wine I ever drank," says Leamington, "is stuff called Rachemputzer. It's made in Dalmatia I believe, and they say that the man who goes to sleep on a bottle of it, must be turned every half-hour, or the liquid will eat a hole through his side."

"Come, come, Leamington, you're not at the 'Traveller's.'"

"I endeavoured to get a *pâté de cheval* for you; but the recent improvements in cavalry have caused all the horses to be bought up," said Dacre.

"Ah!

"Was ever Tartar fierce or cruel
Upon the strength of water gruel?
But who shall stand his rage and force
If first he rides, then *eats* his horse?"

quoted Cyril.

"Have you read B——'s new novel, Chatteris?" asked Fleem, across the table.

"No!"

"He gives a great account of a fox-hunt, in which the hero leaps a brook thirty feet wide."

"I don't care about B——. So much dialogue and so little description."

"I like dialogue. Look at Dumas."

"And Trollope."

"Look at Dickens. There's description for you!"

"Dickens describes exceptions."

"And Thackeray, generalities."

"There you're wrong," says Fleem, "Thackeray takes the type, I admit; but God forbid that Becky Sharp is anything but an exception."

"Don't think she is," said Hurst, shortly.

"Everybody has his own opinion about women," said Dacre. "For my part, I suppose they are necessary evils."

"You young fellows talk nonsense," put in Quantox.

"If it wasn't for the women I might shut up the Isthmian.

Do you imagine that the British public want to see Shakespeare?—not they. They want plenty of pink silk and spangled gauze. Bah! you young men! Give me the hock-Ruper-rte, my boy!"

"Always the same theme, 'Woman,'" cried Hurst. "Like Goldsmith's bench beneath the something shade, it seems for *whispering age*, and talking lovers made."

Quantox frowned. He was hit hard.

"Well, give me Balzac," says Cyril, "he has written the best novel in the world."

"Gil Blas for me!"

"That is a translation."

"No?"

"Well, I think so; it is so exquisitely Spanish."

"'Candide' is a wonderful book!"

"There will be a new style soon," says Hurst.

"I am afraid so," said Quantox, maliciously. "The gentle public don't care for your sporting, tearing, spasmodic books; they have been overdosed with them. Hurst, here, floods the market."

"What does it matter? It pays!"

"That is the great point, then—only you don't think so, Maxwell, my dear-r-r boy. You want Fame. Ah, bah! Shtick to the money, my dear fellow, shtick to the money!"

Hurst laughed.

"Not much to stick to, my dear sir."

"Who is going to Dollington's to-night?" asked Pierre-point.

Lord Dollington was a nobleman who gave musical parties, at which Offenbach was worshipped as a deity.

"I am!" exclaimed an unctuous man, with mutton-chop whiskers, by name Randon, and by profession a *flâneur*. He had an impediment in his speech, and was the most impudent man in London. His weakness was a desperate assertion of frankness. He wore his heart upon his sleeve, and was constantly inviting daws to peck at it. "I am. I—I like Dollington; I own it; I—I own, I f-f-wankly own I like Dollington. Dacre, my d-dear fellow, some aromatic m-mustard. I cannot eat without aromatic m-mustard. I know it's a trouble to you, but I am t-trouble-

some; I own it! I fwankly own I *am* t-troublesome!"

"Harris, the mustard!"

"Ah!" went on the "frank one." "You may talk what you like about c-composers; give me Of-Offenbach! I ought to know, for I think I have a t-taste in m-music. It may be egotistical, I own; but I have a keen p-perception of the b-beautiful and the t-t-twue. I own it! I f-fwankly own it! There are few m-men k-keener to appreciate Art than I am. Hurst, my dear fellow, *you* know that. I own, I f-fwankly own, that you *are* indebted to me. I t-take pleasure in being of service to my f-friends."

"Come to the Isthmian, then!" says Quantox, helping himself to a bird.

"My d-dear Quantox, I cannot stand the Isthmian. V-vewy good in its way, I own; but my n-nature s-sympathises with the T-t-twue! I own, I f-fwankly own, I can't st-st-stand your b-bub-burlesques. What's this! My d-dear D-Dacre, where's the cayenne? Good Ged! ca-cayenne is the soul of made dishes. I own, I f-fwankly own, I *am* a judge of cookery. Harris, give me the cayenne!"

And the shining face distended into a maze of unctuous wrinkles as Mr. Felix Randon emptied the contents of the pepper-caster into his plate.

"Well, I've eaten tobacco and nitron in Gesira, but Randon's 'cayenne' would kill me," whispered Leamington to Calverly.

Poor Bob was silent. In sporting parlance, he was at least three fields behind. This talk about Trollope and Dickens, Gesira, Offenbach, and cookery, bewildered him. He drank off his champagne at a gulp, and stared at Dacre.

That inimitable host came to the rescue.

"By the way, Bob, how's Stockrider? That near fore leg all right?"

"Just a little 'puffy,' that's all."

The magic word, "foreleg," roused Welterwate and Ponsonby.

"Who is going to win the Chester Cup?" asked the former.

"Why, Fly-by-Night, of course!"

"Take your fifteen to three!" cries little Miniver.

"Done!"

"I say, what's become of Windermere? He was too hard hit to recover, I expect?"

"Not he. He's gone to Swabia to shoot snipe," says Fitz-Frederick.

"Are there no snipe in England, in the name of all that's shootable?"

"Oh! Windermere was always a little queer. He proposed to his father's cook one day, because he said she looked like a 'Burgomaster's wife shelling peas,' by Gerard Dow."

"And did she accept?"

"She said that she regretted that she was married already; but, when dear John died, she would be happy to oblige his lordship."

"I like cooks myself," put in Randon. "I f-fwankly own that, if ever I marry, I shall m-marry a cook."

"A ministering angel shall my sister be when thou liest howling," says Hurst.

"Yes, an angel with a stewpan."

"Try that claret, Quantox—a present from Nantwich to his indefatigable secretary."

"How Dacre manages to do so little for his salary is one of the mysteries of the Foreign Office."

"Come, come; no scandal about Queen Elizabeth."

"You've no Foreign Office in Victoria, old fellow," says Cyril to Calverly, laudably wishing to draw him out a little.

"No; we are sadly ignorant of all the amenities of civilisation."

"I knew young Skipp, who went out to Australia years ago," says Leamington.

"What! old Sir Joshua Skipp, the convict amelioration man's nephew?"

"Yes."

Bob Calverly laughed.

"What is it, Bob?" asked Dacre.

"I remember the fellow. I knew him when I was a boy. Ha, ha! I was stopping at a station in Narangia, Port Phillip, as the place used to be called then, and there was a fellow there—poor Jack Briscoe—who got

rather muddled, and having heard old Sir Joshua's name in connection with 'convicts,' insisted that Skipp's uncle had been transported. Skipp was highly indignant, and offered to bet fabulous sums on the event. Briscoe took him up to three hundred pounds, payable by a draft on the old gentleman himself; and, being still unconvinced, the matter was decided by a fight in the stockyard by moonlight, with all the fellows sitting on the rails smoking."

"How did it end?"

"Oh, Skipp thrashed him after thirteen rounds; and we broke open another case of brandy to drink to the honour of the family."

There was a general laugh.

"You must be strange fellows out there!" says Miniver.

"There were some curious things done in the old days," returned Bob, warming with his subject. "There was a fellow I knew who was Acting Governor, Sheriff, and Judge of Supreme Court, all at once, at Hobart Town. He was terribly in debt, and his creditors filed bills to any extent against him. He heard the case himself, in defiance of all law and equity; gave 'judgment for the plaintiff;' issued a warrant for his own arrest, and then made his own house the gaol, and never did any work for six months."

There was an incredulous chorus.

"I can easily believe it," says Dacre. "Old Grey, who used to be chief clerk in the 'Colonial,' told me that, when Tiger Dodds was made Sheriff at Norfolk Island, he used to ride rough shod over everyone. The Governor gave a picnic on one occasion, and Dodds, being invited, found that eight men were to be hanged that morning, and he could not go. He had the fellows brought up before him, and made a pretty little speech, in which he suggested that, as a day or two could not make much difference to them, they should be hung on Monday instead of Wednesday, in order that he might go to the picnic."

"By Jove! what did they say?"

"Well, the story goes that the fellows retired to consult; and that, after some ten minutes or so, the biggest ruffian, being elected spokesman, pulled his forelock, and said—'It's werry hard that a man should lose two day's life,

sir; but me and my mates were a-talkin' it over, and, seein' as how you've always been a good master to us, and always given a cove a chance, we're willin' to oblige you in any way; and, if you'll give us a fig of tobacco and a glass o' rum, *we don't mind!*"

"Bravo, Dacre! That is the best story told to-night!"

"And every word of it's true."

The careful Harris appearing at this juncture with cigars, smoke was added to the charms of talk and liquor; and Bob Calverly found himself, at two in the morning, contemplating the placid face of the sleeping Welterwater through a misty halo of wine and tobacco. Pierrepont was endeavouring to book a "pony" upon Fly-by-Night, but his uncertain fingers refused to direct the pencil; while Maxwell Hurst was attacking Cyril Chatteris upon the subject of the "variation of species." Dacre, ever calm and genial, was toying with his fifth cigar and "drawing out" Quantox, who, with his rubicund face more rubicund than ever, was telling, with many leers and winks, a somewhat incoherent anecdote concerning Madame Vestris and the late Duke of Wellington. Fleem had gone home with Leamington. Ponsonby was tossing Fitz-Frederick for sovereigns. And Mr. Felix Randon, with increased unctuousness and difficulty of articulation, was vowing in loud tones "that for his part he l-l-liked, he owned it, f-f-fwankly ow-owned it—he l-liked these little *réuni-unions* of ch-choice spirits! These w-worshippings at the shrine of the Bub-beautiful and the Tutterwue!"

Bob roused himself.

"I shall go home!" *His* legs were a little unsteady too.

"Nonsense," says Ponsonby. "Nobody ever goes home, sweet home. Do they, Dacre?"

"What is there to do, then, my dear fellow?" asks the bland host, with his self-sacrificial air.

"Let's go to Charlie's, and have a little hazard!" cries Welterwater.

"Good!" says Randon. "I own, I f-f-wankly own, I like hazard! To Ch-Charlie's!"

Dacre allowed himself to be drawn into a reluctant consent; and all the party, except Hurst and Quantox who went home arm-in-arm, sallied forth together.

CHAPTER XI.

"JACTA EST ALBA."

SOMEBODY has remarked somewhere, that "if a man only sets himself to study the weakness of his fellow-creatures, he may live in luxury all the days of his life."

"Charlie Ryle" was an instance of the truth of this statement. He lived well, kept good horses, subscribed liberally to charities, owned a charming house at Hampton Court, and was considered a highly respectable person with a large business in the city. There were some fifty men in London, however, who did not believe in his respectability. Though he was personally unknown to most of them, still, the name "Charlie Ryle" was a synonym for that never-palling amusement—that Pierian spring of delicious excitement, which never runs dry—Play.

Mr. Ryle's "city" was a house in Jermyn Street—a very pleasant house when you were once inside it, a house where the choicest cigars and wines were presented free of charge to Mr. Ryle's friends, and where a little chicken-hazard was occasionally—indeed, almost always—to be achieved if the "friends" wished it.

The double doors swung open at the entrance of Pierre-point and Dacre, and a smiling face having scanned the party through a little wicket, an inner door opened and admitted them into the sanctum.

"H-here we are!" exclaimed Randon. "The sacred atmosphere of p-play surrounds us. W-waiter! b-bwing me some ch-cham-pagne and s-s-soda. I f-feel in l-luck to-night. I own, I f-fwankly own, I feel in gug-great l-luck!"

There were only some six men in the place. One a guardsman; one a younger son, who was losing with the calmness of despair; one a rich importer of wines; two light cavalry officers; and a white-haired *attaché* to the Austrian embassy.

A sombre figure was lying on a sofa, smoking cigarettes. He nodded to Dacre carelessly. The innocent Australian looked at him with interest. He was of the middle height, of sallow complexion, clean-shaved as to his cheeks, with

a long drooping moustache like that affected by a Mandarin with a taste for dandyism. Hair closely cropped *à la malcontent*, lips thin and tightly compressed, and stony blue eyes. He was dressed in a blue surtout, his shirt front was narrowly frilled, and he wore no apparent jewellery save a heavy signet ring on the forefinger of his left hand.

"Who is he?" asked Bob.

"Baron Gablentz, the most reckless and fortunate gambler in Europe. At Dresden he was the terror of the Adelige-Resource; at the English Club at St. Petersburg, he and General Tschenyhagen between them cleared poor Saltash out of fifty thou.; Chabôt trembles when he enters the Kursaal at Wiesbaden; the croupiers of Hombourg grow pale as they watch him calmly staking his *rouleaux*. He was ordered to leave Berlin at the instance of the old Duke of Schweinwurstel, from whose grand-nephew, the young Prince William, he won a hundred thousand thalers at a sitting. Gablentz would not abate a farthing of the debt, and before he left, obtained a promise that the duke should pay him five thousand thalers a-year. Don't play with him, my boy! He is too heavy metal for fellows like you and I."

"What do you say to a little quiet *écarté*?" asked Leamington.

"When at Rome, I suppose one must follow the Romans. If guinea points will be enough, I'll play with you," returned Dacre.

"Five pounds on the game?"

"As you please."

And they sat down together at one of the little tables in the first room.

"This way!" cries Ponsonby, pushing open another door.

"Ah! Berry, how goes it?"

"Badly," replied a lad, whose smooth cheeks betokened his youth. "Lost five hundred pounds just now. Pull up again, I suppose. Seven was the main. I threw five, and now it's three to two!"

"Going in, Mr. C-Cal-verly?" says Randon. "I own, I f-fwankly own, I c-can't resist the t-t-temptation. In p-ponies, my d-dear Berry!"

"I'm with you!" says Bob, recklessly.

"Anybody else?" cries the ingenuous youth, his blue eyes blazing with excitement.

Ponsonby and Welterwate went in, of course, while Miniver remarked that he preferred waiting till he got hold of the "bones" himself.

The dice fell on the table.

"Crabs! by the L-L-Lord Harry!" says Randon. "I f-fwankly own I n-never s-saw such l-luck!"

"Give me some sodawater; I shall go home," says Berry, rising.

Bob sat down in his place, and the game went merrily on.

The Australian won all before him. He had never played hazard before, and it is one of the peculiar charms of that pleasing method of getting rid of superfluous cash that a novice always wins.

"Why, you are a terrible fellow, Bob," says Miniver, as he handed over an I.O.U. "You'll clean me out completely!"

"Nine's the main!"

"Eight, by Jove!"

"Here, take the box, Fitz; my luck's turned."

"It *will*, if you talk like that," said old Grosmith, who was an inveterate believer in chance.

"My turn? Well, I own, I f-fwankly own, it *is* hard. Five!"

"Five it is!"

"Th-that's another f-fifty, old boy. T-try again. Seven!"

"I won't bet any more."

"Twelve! Just missed the nick. Why didn't you play, Calverly?"

And then Bob did play, and won, and played again and lost; and then won—and then lost with amazing pertinacity. His throat felt dry, and he called for champagne to cool it, and then somebody in a mist gave him a "good cigar", and he smoked it; and then it seemed to him that he was looking on at a play through a fog, and that one of the principal characters was a Mr. Robert Calverly, who was giving very illegible I.O.U.'s to everybody. By and by Ponsonby went away, and then Miniver, and his last recollection was a vision of little Fitz-Frederick writing a

cheque at a side-table, and Randon, after throwing a succession of mains, rattling the box gaily, and exclaiming, with wonderful flourishes in the way of articulation, that "He n-n-never s-s-saw any-anything l-lul-like it. He ow-ow-owned, f-f-f-fuf-fuf-fwankly owned, that he n-nev-never h-had s-such lul-lul-luck in his life. He owned, f-f-fwankly owned, he *was* a b-bubold p-player. But still, my d-dear f-fellow—s-seven again! By Jove; another p-pony! Well, I own, I f-f-f-fwankly own—" (*da capo*).

In the meantime Cyril had lost five-and-twenty pounds, and being less elated than the others had determined to lose no more. He found Dacre piling up a little heap of sovereigns and shillings, and Leamington looking for his hat in the ante-room. Gablentz had gone, and the room was heavy with tobacco smoke.

"Where's the Melibœus of the antipodes?" asked Dacre, looking up.

"Hard at it in the next room. I believe he's lost over a thousand pounds."

"Well, I suppose he can afford it. Young men will be young men, my dear boy. I hope *you* have not dipped into the whirlpool of destruction."

"No! I only lost a pony."

"Too much, Cyril; too much. You should be careful, my dear fellow. You know I am *in loco parentis* just now, so excuse these humble words of warning."

"It's all very fine, Rupert, but you come here and win a hatful of money, and then lecture me for playing hazard."

"Hazard and *écarté* are two vastly different things. One exercises the faculties, and sharpens the perceptions; the other only lightens the pocket."

"There's something in that."

"Ha, ha! Come along, old fellow, we will go home. I kept the cab waiting, and can drop you in South Audley Street."

"In Audley Street! what should I want—" He stopped just in time.

"Or Dym Street, if you prefer it."

"Dym Street!"

"I know all about it, my dear boy. Oh, you're a sly young dog."

"All about what?" says Cyril.

"About that little friend of yours that we saw in the cab one day."

They had reached the outer door by this time, and Cyril's first impulse was to hurl his friend into the street. Civilisation asserted her sway, however.

He took a cigar out of his case and twisted it between his fingers with assumed indifference.

"My dear Dacre, what *do* you mean?"

"I mean, my dear boy, that you have picked up a very pretty little woman. 'Mrs. Chatteris' does credit to your taste."

Cyril was fairly at bay. His secret was evidently discovered. Should he deny or confess? Had the two men been alone in the field or wilderness, instead of standing on the steps of a London house in the grey of early dawn, with a London cabman within earshot, it might have gone hardly for Rupert Dacre. Cyril stopped in the act of lighting his cigar, and shot one glance at his tormentor. The calm eyes were calm as ever, and there was no pity in the smiling mouth.

"Upon my word, when the little thing called herself Mrs. Chatteris, I thought it was your wife."

The contempt in his tone was so evident, that Cyril blushed.

"My dear fellow, do you think I am a fool?" said he.

CHAPTER XII.

A RETREAT BEFORE HEAVY GUNS.

THE feelings of Mr. Cyril Chatteris, upon awaking on the morning after his conversation with Rupert Dacre, were by no means amiable. In the first place, his head ached, and his tongue felt more like an old file partially covered with fur than an ordinary organ of speech; in the second, his mind was nearly as uneasy as his head. Young as he was, there was quite enough of astuteness in Cyril to go very far towards supplying the want of actual knowledge of the world, and he could not disguise from himself

that Dacre was not the sort of man to rest contented with the information he had given him on the subject of the "little thing" who "called herself Mrs. Chatteris."

"Confound the fellow!" he muttered, as he turned impatiently in the bed, and looking round the room, saw his young wife standing before the toilet-table, arranging her hair. "What does he mean by calling her a 'little thing?'—and what the deuce does it matter to him whether she is Mrs. Chatteris or not!"

"Little thing" Carry might be, but a very fascinating, a very charming "little thing," indeed, as she stood before the glass, her white fingers moving rapidly through the masses of soft brown hair. Some excuse for Mr. Rupert Dacre's curiosity at any rate, and for a single moment Cyril felt rather uncomfortable. What if Dacre had believed his statement, and regarded his affair with Carry merely as one of those "convenient connections" that club life in men and milliner's bills in women have rendered so common. Fair as was Dacre's reputation in the world, Cyril knew well enough that his creed regarding women was even as that of others, and that, like the dark Earl of Morton, he was not likely to be baulked in a chase by any scruples of conscience regarding poaching. All this was extremely annoying, and in his heart Cyril cursed the feeling of loving anxiety for his safety that had sent his wife to the *Mercury* office.

"Silly little thing," he thought, "just as if she couldn't have waited patiently for a day or two longer, instead of exposing herself to all sorts of remarks, and me to all sorts of questions. Master Rupert won't rest quiet with what I told him, that is certain, and if he should find out the truth—why then——"

Then what? Simple enough to guess what. He would be in the hands of this cool-headed calculating diplomatist. The heir of Matcham in the hands of a man whose pecuniary prospects were so slight that he had declared leanness, good blood, and money as indispensable to his settlement in life.

"He'll squeeze me!" was his first thought; "just the man to do it." And then another thought flashed across his mind—a thought that, with all his callous indifference

to others' suffering, sent the blood with a hot rush to his forehead, and set the teeth firmly between lips tightly compressed. A thought connected with Dacre's other words; a thought connected with his young wife, who had so trustingly yielded to his wish for secrecy, and who now—the troublesome brown hair neatly coiled round her pretty head—turned and faced him. Just as pretty and fascinating looking as ever, but with a very perceptible tinge of petulant disappointment on her features. The eyes looked sad, too, and the long eye-lashes rested on a cheek more flushed than usual.

Cyril had felt rather angry with her a few moments before, but it was not easy to be long angry with a face and figure like the one before him. She might have been "silly," certainly, in going to the office, but quite as certainly she looked uncommonly pretty now, especially to a newly made husband, with a slightly sore head, and a strong desire for petting and soda water.

"Ah, Carry!" he said, lifting his head and resting on his elbow, "I'm afraid I came home rather late last night; but it wasn't my fault. One never can get away from these semi-literary dinners at anything approaching to decent hours."

"Early in the morning, you mean, Cyril," replied Carry, the flush deepening on her cheek. "I sat up for you, oh, ever so long!—and then—then I——"

The soft eyes filled with tears, and she stopped.

Cyril Chatteris was by no means very tender-hearted, and, like many of his stamp, rather liked to see women weep over his delinquencies. But now the signs of grief annoyed him, and he said pettishly,

"Are you going to begin Caudle lectures already, Carry? Isn't it rather too soon for that sort of thing? Doesn't it strike you that it might not exactly answer?"

"I don't want to lecture you at all; but I think that before we have been married a week, for you to stay out till daylight is very, very unkind, indeed—cruel, very cru——"

The tears welled up again. Tears, adverbs, and adjectives, the whole armoury of female anger brought to bear on a man with an increasing headache, and a decided

inclination to bad temper. It was rather too much. Cyril felt inclined to give in, if only for the sake of peace and quiet. But the petty pride that was his chief characteristic forbade him. Besides, it *was* a great deal too soon for this sort of lecture, and Carry should find that it was. So he dropped his head back on the pillow, and turning carelessly round, closed his eyes.

Carry stood by the bed-side a moment in silence, looking down on her young husband. She was waiting for another word, and a kind one she hoped, but she waited in vain. Cyril only muttered something about headache and sleepy, and kept his eyes closed. He looked very handsome, as he lay thus, even with the angry look on his face. Women are always sympathetic, too, when headaches are concerned, and the love-light was still burning in Carry's heart, even as her husband had seen it in her eyes a short time before. Perhaps, after all, Cyril couldn't help stopping out. He was very young still, and she knew he had so many bachelor friends. Wouldn't it be better to say something kind to him, especially when he felt ill, poor fellow. She didn't want to quarrel so soon, she *would* make it up.

Very lightly she placed her soft little hand—the hand that Mrs. Manton, prudent woman, had never suffered to do any work—upon the feverish head, and ran her fingers through the clustering hair.

But grumpy Cyril only moved impatiently, and appeared to think the pretty hand rather in the way.

"Does your head ache very much, Cyril?" asked Carry, timidly. She was afraid she had gone a little too far. What if the Fairy Prince were to turn tyrant on her hands, for want of a little kindness at first?

"Awfully," replied Cyril, without opening his eyes, "and your lecturing doesn't improve it."

"Shall I bring you up some tea, dear?" asked Carry, whose knowledge of the treatment of post-supper cures was limited.

"Now, Carry, this is really too bad!" said Cyril, determined to win the battle. "First you make my head ache by scolding me, and then you tease me about tea. I want quiet—that is all—and that you don't seem disposed to let me enjoy."

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Fast into poor Carry's eyes came the hot tears. She had scolded so little, and Cyril was so cross.

"If you loved me as you have said you do," went on Cyril, feeling that his victory was nearly won, "you wouldn't commence lecturing me when you must have seen I was ill. But I suppose you're like the rest of your sex in the matter of loving. It's very deep affection, indeed, so long as one pleases you, but it's wonderful how it alters if a check comes."

"Oh! Cyril, Cyril!" sobbed poor Carry, utterly unable to hold out any longer, and the tears rising hotter than ever. "*How* can you speak so to me, when you know I love you more than I can tell; when I have consented to everything you have asked of me. I know you must stop out late sometimes; and if I have been cross, won't you forgive me, Cyril—my own darling Cy——"

Sobs again, his hand tenderly clasped in hers, and her soft kisses on his fevered forehead.

"Victor!" muttered Cyril, and, taking up the rôle of a high-minded conqueror, he generously forgave her.

No more scolding from her at any rate, he thought, as Carry ran downstairs, wiping her eyes, and trying to check her sobs, to look for the soda water, that her young husband had told her was the best treatment for a nervous headache.

* * * * *

Lounging into the small drawing-room late in the afternoon, Cyril felt that he had asserted his rights, and that Carry at least was pliant enough for his purposes.

"I can twist her round my finger!" he said to himself, looking carelessly in the glass, "and that's some consolation."

Consolation wanted a week after marriage! A bad look-out, indeed, for the girl such a man had married.

But clever Cyril had reckoned without his host. Mrs. Manton was not Carry, and if the truth be told, rather disliked the son-in-law, who had turned her so coolly out of the rooms. "A proud stuck-up puppy!" she had mentally called him, with a contemporary resolve to pay him back as soon as possible. "I'll be down on him the first chance he gives me," thought the angry matron,

prudence giving way to indignation, and a very heavy and very unpleasant weight to come down upon any one was the relict of the deceased Manton.

"Nice behaviour, indeed," the widow had said to Carry, when sitting up for Cyril the night before. "First he marries you, and then he wants you to keep it secret, and then, hafter a few days, he stops hout to hall hours. I should just like to have seen your father trying it on with me!" It was not very difficult to guess at the consequences to the dear departed had he tried any such experiment, but Carry only silently wished that mamma wouldn't drop her "h's," and said aloud that she hoped she wouldn't speak to Cyril.

"Oh! but I will!" said Mrs. Manton, warming up. "I'll teach him you're not to be played with. Displease his father, indeed; let 'im look out 'e don't displease me by his goings-on."

And with this remark, and advice to Carry to go to bed and not make a fool of herself, Mrs. Manton had gone off herself.

Determined for the fight, however, was the landlady, who had never allowed a lodger, even a "first floor," to get the better of her, and before Chatteris had been in the drawing-room five minutes, in she marched, her face flushed, her front plastered more rigidly down than ever, and wearing a cap so fearfully and wonderfully made in the way of lace and ribbons, that Cyril shuddered.

"Good morning, Mrs. Manton," he said, giving the fire a vigorous poke, and not succeeding in looking so unconcerned as he wished to. "A cold morning, isn't it?"

"Hafternoon, you mean, Mr. Chatteris?" said the lady of the cap, with a sort of gulp, prophetic of a coming storm. "I 'ope your hearly rising won't 'urt you, sir?"

No answer from Chatteris, who was now beginning to feel his feet, and Mrs. Manton went on.

"If you think it's hacting 'onerable, Mr. Chatteris, to marry a young girl as would be a treasure to a king, to hask 'er to conceal her marriage for fear of your father's hanger, and then to treat 'er as you did last night—hi don't!"

"Your sentiments do you credit, no doubt, Mrs. Manton," said Cyril, in his easiest manner, and carelessly filling his

pipe as he spoke, "but permit me to ask whether you have considered your right to interfere?"

Mrs. Manton was dumbfounded. The "parlours" was not so soft, after all. But he wasn't going to beat her in that way.

"'Ave I a right!" she burst out. "You hask me if I 'ave a right? I've the right of a mother, who 'as nursed and brought up the poor girl you are treating so basely. Yes, basely! that's the word, Mr. Cyril Chatteris, and make the best hof it! Gentleman, hindeed!"

Another gulp, and a drawing in of the breath for a fresh start.

But Cyril had had enough. Bitterly, oh! how bitterly he felt that he had been the "fool" he had denied himself to be. Pretty, loveable as his wife might be, was it for a connection with a cap-wearing creature like this that he had sacrificed all chance of winning so bright a prize as Kate Ffrench? Back upon his mind, with a gush of anger at his own folly, that was almost irrestrainable, came the remembrance of that scene in the library, when he first realised all that he had thrown away. And for what? For a wife whom he had already been compelled to deny—for the daughter of a woman like the one who, more vulgar than his father's housekeeper, had dared to talk to him—a Chatteris of Matcham—about honour! Fool—weak fool! he had been, indeed, but he would be so no longer. He would get rid of *this* encumbrance at least.

These thoughts ran so quickly through his mind that before Mrs. Manton had regained her breath, he had walked to the door, and flung it open, to find himself face to face with Carry, who was standing outside the door, the tears still on her face.

"You are come in time, Carry," he said, gently leading her into the room; "in time to hear what I am going to say to your mother."

"Mrs. Manton," he went on, "I beg you once for all to understand that I have married your daughter, but not you. You have no right to meddle in our affairs at all; and as I don't choose to have a repetition of this, I shall leave the house at once, and take Carry with me. Carry, I shall be back very soon; have everything ready by the time I return."

He had descended the stairs, and was out in the street before Mrs. Manton's cap ribbons had done trembling.

In less than an hour he was back, and while Mrs. Manton looked on helplessly, the boxes Carry had packed were placed on a cab, and Cyril stood in the passage waiting for his wife.

Hot-tempered, vulgar as she was, Mrs. Manton really loved her daughter, and she felt very much inclined to give in.

"Where is he going to take you to, Carry?" she asked, as Carry flung her arms round her neck and sobbed on the breast of the mother who had so carefully tended her.

"I don't know, he won't tell me."

"Then hit's a burning shame," the cap-ribbons trembled more than ever now, "and hi won't stand it."

So she went out to where Chatteris stood in the passage.

"His this true, Mr. Chatteris; won't you tell me where you're going to take my Carry?"

"Certainly not!" replied Cyril coolly.

"Then hunderstand, sir, hi won't hallow it, not if you were twenty Chatterises."

"Very good," said Cyril again, "Carry can remain if she choose, I will not."

"Oh, mother!" sobbed the poor girl, "Cyril is my husband. Thanks for all your love, but I must go with him."

"Hof course you must," said the angry landlady, "hand leave your mother, see her hinsulted, too, by that puppy. Hi'm hashamed of you, Carry; and has for 'im, hi'll see what 'is father will say to hit. I suppose a letter will reach Mr. Chatteris hat Matcham has well has hanywhere helse."

Up in Chatteris' soul rose the evil savage spirit that worldly tact had kept down in his conversation with Dacre. He turned on Mrs. Manton so quickly and fiercely, and with such a look, that she shrank back into her room.

"Write to my father," he said, "write to him only one line, and see what comes of it. You are a woman of some experience, Mrs. Manton, and must have seen a great deal of similar marriages to mine. Do you think I've been a fool in this matter? Come, Carry."

The next moment he had handed his wife into the cab,

and looking at the dark expression of the face she loved, Carry did not dare to say a word.

"Do you think I am a fool." The same words he had said to Rupert Dacre, but by Mrs. Manton they were not so quietly taken. A vague sickening fear of some harm to her daughter kept her seated, silent and thoughtful, before the fire long after the cab had driven away.

In the course of the evening Mr. Rupert Dacre knocked at the door, and asked carelessly if Mr. Chatteris was in.

A stout female, with shaking cap ribbons and a red face, informed him shortly that Mr. Chatteris had left, and having a natural antipathy to stout women, cap ribbons and red faces, Mr. Rupert Dacre walked away without asking a single question.

But before he had reached the end of the street he fell into such a fit of musing as he had not yielded to for some time. "There's more in that 'little thing,' mystery, than I thought. Surely the fellow *can't* have made a fool of himself after all."

CHAPTER XIII.

CHECK, AND NO CHEQUE.

MR. ROBERT CALVERLY, in his room at Limmer's on the morning after his visit to the "quiet little place in Jermyn Street," was also decidedly uneasy in his mind. As close a calculation as circumstances would permit showed that he had lost rather more than the "thousand" Cyril had guessed at, and the loss worried him. Not that it would ruin him by any means. Old Calverly had taken too good care of his son's welfare for a "thou" to swamp him. But bush life makes a man as cautious in some things, as reckless in others; and Bob by no means relished the loss of a thousand pounds over the green cloth. Gambling was not to his own taste, he knew that his father hated it, and as he totted down some hasty figures in his notebook, he mentally resolved not to try *that* little game again. However, the money had got to be paid. The question was how! His original three thousand had long since gone

the way of all coin. His agents, Messrs. Fleece, Pack, and Co., had already advanced considerably, and his last letter had brought him no additional finances. The only plan he could think of was to go down to his agents again and state his wants. So he dressed himself carefully, took a B. and S. to steady a rather shaky hand, and was soon rattling in a hansom towards the city.

Messrs. Fleece, Pack, and Co., the London agents of several Australian squatters, had large but rather dingy offices in Austin Friars. At the back of the old Dutch church their clerks toiled from morning to evening over huge ledgers—fearful mysteries to the uninitiated, terrible books to the correspondents in arrears. Charles Fleece, Esq., head of the firm, had been in the business for years, and from long correspondence was nearly as well up in Australian affairs as if he had been there. He could tell you to a fraction how much the millionaires, Sumner Brothers, had given for the Bigguoroo Station, on the Lachlan, and how many bills and promissory notes poor Reckless, the original owner, had signed before an extra bad season sent him through the Insolvent Court and his station to the auction mart. He knew nearly as well as the local manager when the Bank of Victoria was going to stop the overdraft and put the screw on to Percy Robinson, and how little chance that gentleman had of holding out another season. He was not given much to talking of these matters in his country house; but after dinner in his snug villa at Twickenham, he could tell a secondhand cattle-muster yarn nearly as well as the junior partner, Pack, who had been on the Murrumbidgee for years before he went into the counting-house of the Melbourne branch, and finally came home as junior partner. A tall, sturdy-looking fellow, was John Pack, formerly of Eribunderee, broad-chested and sunburnt, with hands of which three years of London glove-wearing had scarcely lightened the hue. A sharp, keen man of business, moreover, but withal a good-natured, well-meaning, and strictly honorable man. Mr. Robert Calverly's affairs were by no means in bad hands, but of the two partners, the junior was certainly the most liberal; and if ever the screw had to be put on, it was generally Mr. Fleece who turned the handle.

"Mr. Robert Calverly," announced one of the clerks; and Bob was shown into the office of the junior partner.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Calverly!" said Pack, offering his hand. "How are you? Not looking so well as usual. London life not so wholesome as the bush, eh?"

Bob certainly didn't either feel or look very well, but, like most men, he didn't like being told of it, so he said, shortly,

"Oh, thanks, I am quite well; but I have a little business to settle with you. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"Half-an-hour, if you like. What is it? Any news from the old place? Any more wool to get rid of?—any golden fleeces?"

"Well, no," said Bob, colouring slightly. "My last letter told me absolutely nothing. I want to know how my account stands. On the wrong side, I suppose?"

"Well, I fancy a little that way," was the answer, with a quiet smile. "Here, Wilson, bring in Mr. Calverly's account."

The account was brought in, after a delay of about ten minutes, during which Mr. Pack chatted about all sorts of subjects, from the money market to the "Two Thousand," and Mr. Bob Calverly paid unusual attention to his finger nails.

"Hum!" said the junior partner, running his eyes down the paper. "On the 1st, £350; on the 12th, £750; on the 20th, £1600; on the—. Here you are, Mr. Calverly, somewhere about £2000 to the debit."

Bob took the paper, and as he held it in his hand, the eyebrows slightly contracted over the eyes that read it.

Two thousand to the debit! He had no idea he had spent so much, even with all the kid gloves from Houbigant's, the pleasant little dinners at Richmond, the flirtations in the *coulisses*, the bouquets from Garcia's, and the coats from Poole's. Two thousand to the debit, and no letter of credit from home! Well, it was no good poring over it. The account was evidently right. The money had been spent, and he wanted more, for even of "ready" to carry on with he was denuded. There was no remedy for it—he must be a little more to the debit.

"Mr. Pack," he said at last, putting down the paper on the writing-table, before which the agent was seated.

"Well, Mr. Calverly, is it all right?"

"Oh yes, it's all right; but the thing is, I want some more money at once. I'm pretty well cleaned out."

"Hum!" said Mr. Pack, rather drily. "How much do you want?"

"About fifteen hundred," answered Bob, struck with a bright idea that he must have some ready cash to go on with after the thousand had been cleared off.

"Fifteen hundred!" Mr. Pack's eyebrows went up a little as he took up the account, and again ran his eye over it. "Wait a minute, Mr. Calverly. I will talk to Mr. Fleece about it."

And he left the room.

As the swing-door closed behind the agent, Bob came to the conclusion that the look-out was not very promising. Pack had hitherto honoured all his demands without the slightest reference to his partner. This time he had gone to consult him, and Bob felt very uncomfortable. He had never been refused money before, and he didn't like the novelty. A few minutes, and back came Mr. Pack.

"Come into Mr. Fleece's room a minute, Mr. Calverly; he wishes to see you."

In marched Bob accordingly, his head thrown back a little more than usual, and a slight additional flush on the cheek, from which London life was fast wearing the bronze.

Mr. Fleece was standing before the fire, *more Anglicam*, and looked stout, rosy, and good-tempered, but at the same time excessively 'cute. The look-out was less promising than before.

"Good day, Mr. Calverly," he said, with the kindest possible smile, holding out a ready hand for Bob's grasp. "Pack tells me you want to see me. What can I do for you?"

"Confound him," thought Bob. "I didn't want to see him. I wanted to see the money."

Then aloud,

"I won't keep you very long, Mr. Fleece. Mr. Pack knows what I want—an advance of fifteen hundred pounds."

Mr. Fleece looked as good-tempered as ever, but said nothing.

"You see," went on Bob, wishing in his heart that Mr. Fleece was a three-railer, that he might ride over him and settle the matter at once, "I've been spending a little more money than usual lately, and, till next mail, am decidedly short."

"Ah! yes," said Mr. Fleece, still good-tempered, but still 'cute, "it's astonishing how money does go in a London season, Mr. Calverly. Have you heard from your father this mail, Mr. Calverly?"

"Only a few lines."

"Ah! not much of a correspondent, I suppose; and how was Melbourne looking when he wrote. Not very promising times for squatters with that 42nd clause of the Land Act. I expect they must find those free selectors rather a nuisance."

"Confounded nuisance," replied Bob, whose "down" on a free selector was equal to his dislike of a "swagman on the wallaby."

"So they must be," went on Mr. Fleece, giving his right hand an additional warm at the fire, while Pack, with a queer look took up the *Argus*. "Capital article that about those fellows in 'All the Year Round.' Did you read it?"

Bob hadn't read it; hadn't read much of anything lately, and said so. The look-out was more unpromising than ever. Why the deuce couldn't Mr. Fleece come to the point? Another warm; a few more inquiries about sheep generally; and, still good-tempered, but still distressingly 'cute, Mr. Fleece *did* come to the point.

"Well, Mr. Calverly, I enjoy these little pleasant chats, but business, you know, business. What can I do for you?"

"What can you do," said Bob. "Why, I've told you. Let me have fifteen hundred pounds."

"Fifteen hundred pounds!" said Mr. Fleece. His eyebrows did not go up, but the left hand came in for a warming this time, and he looked a little more 'cute than good-tempered. "Fifteen hundred! Well, really, Mr. Calverly, I shouldn't like to refuse you, but, you see——"

Pack, let me look at that account. Two thousand to the debit already, and wool falling. Lots of scab about, too. Did you hear of that affair at Swan Hill? Twenty thousand sheep not allowed to cross the Murray, although passed by the New South Wales inspector."

"D——n the scab," muttered Bob. "No, I didn't."

"Ah! curious affair, Mr. Calverly. Doesn't look very encouraging, that sort of thing. Nothing from your father, eh?"

"I told you no," said Bob, wishing this time that Mr. Fleece was a "beast", and he had hold of a branding iron.

"That's just what I told you, Pack," said Mr. Fleece, positively glowing with good temper. "Mr. Calverly, senior, is very cautious indeed; never hazards an opinion unless he is sure of it. I expect he can see through these nasty little political squabbles as well as anyone, though he does not go in much for meddling with them, eh, Mr. Calverly?"

Bob was a patient fellow enough, but he couldn't stand it any longer. Mr. Fleece evidently would not come to the point, and so he did it himself with—

"Mr. Fleece, excuse my asking you for a straightforward answer to my question. Will you advance me fifteen hundred pounds or not?"

"Well, my dear Mr. Calverly, you know, and your father knows, how matters are in Australia just now, and really I think—let me see. You said your father had not sent you any further authority?"

The flush rose deeper than ever to Bob Calverly's cheek. Mr. Fleece might be very good-tempered, but he was getting rude.

"I must interrupt you again, Mr. Fleece," trying very hard to keep his temper, "I simply want to know whether you will let me have an advance of fifteen hundred pounds or not. I told you before I had heard nothing from my father, but I shall be very happy to give you an order on him for the money."

"Now, really, Mr. Calverly," replied the senior partner, with a smile even more beaming than before, as his 'cuteness discovered a loophole through which his good temper might pass unscathed. "Now, really, you'll excuse me telling you that our house never meddles with that sort

of business. It's a practice our standing in the city would never permit. I firmly believe it would ruin our agency if such a thing were known. Now, do just write to your father, and see what he says on the subject. His opinion would be most valuable. Fifteen hundred pounds is a trifle, Mr. Calverly, both to you—I am sure of it—and to us, I believe, but, really, such a very singular proceeding. I'm surprised, Mr. Calverly. Pack, just let Mr. Calverly's account be made out and forwarded, in duplicate, to Melbourne. And now, Mr. Calverly, I'm sure you'll excuse me. I have a great deal to do. By the by, you have never been out to Twickenham yet. Will you give us the pleasure of your company on Tuesday next? Mrs. Fleece will be delighted. Pack will meet you; and we can have a few 'yarns' about the old place," concluded Mr. Fleece, in a perfect burst of good temper and imaginary old colonialism.

"Thank you," said Bob, very haughtily, and taking up his hat; "I am engaged, unfortunately. I will write to my father by the next mail, and see what he thinks of it. Good morning, Mr. Fleece." And, without offering to shake hands, he bowed to the partners and left the office, only noticing that Mr. Fleece was looking as good-tempered as ever, and only hearing a repeated expression of hope that "he *would* write to his father, whose opinion was so estimable on all these colonial subjects."

* * * *

"Hang it, Fleece," said the junior partner, after Bob had left, why didn't you let him have the money? Old Calverly is as safe as a church."

"Rather safer than some churches, Pack; but I know my road."

"So you say," was the answer; "but it strikes me you've hit on a short cut to lose the agency."

"Don't you believe it, my dear fellow," replied the senior, more good-temperedly than ever. "Remind me to write to Old Calverly this mail. He's had rather a hard squeeze himself lately, worm as he is, and it would not do to let this young one get too deep into our books. He's been gambling here, I know, and that the governor

won't believe in at all. Don't you be alarmed, Pack, we are on the right side of the fence."

Mr. Pack, however, didn't think so, and went into his own room with the opinion that Bob was a fine young fellow, and that if he had been alone in the matter, the money should have been paid.

* * * * *

And while the partners talked, Mr. Bob Calverly was being driven rapidly to Rupert Dacre's office.

"He's not an over and above generous fellow," muttered the Australian as the hansom rolled along, "but if any fellow can advise another out of a mess, he's the man."

The cab stopped. Lord Nantwich's private secretary was in.

"All right," said Bob, as he ran up the stairs, and with a wish that he were a "buckjumper," with Mr. Fleece on his back, he knocked at the door of Rupert Dacre's room.

CHAPTER XIV.

WAYS AND MEANS.

THERE is, as a rule, no greater official dandy than your rising young diplomatist; that is, in his official surroundings. Looking at them in the abstract, there is not much apparent dandyism in foolscap paper, large envelopes marked with the inevitable O.H.M.S., and in the concomitant red tape. But it is astonishing how much can be got out of them in the hands of one up to the work, and with the aid of polished mahogany, green baize, morocco, brightly burning coals, and burnished fire-irons. And no one understood these things better than the private secretary of Lord Nantwich,

Preaching, as is the fashion, liberal ideas, no one could have been more personally aristocratic, more internally strong in his hatred of the *profanum vulgus*. So far as his own feelings were concerned, he would keep them outside the magic ring, till their hearts were cold with expectant waiting! He had, too, all the impressive

manner of conscious information on points utterly beyond the general public, so earnestly cultivated by young diplomats. It came naturally to him, that "I really-can't-tell-you-any-more" sort of manner, that so many strive in vain to attain. Perfectly well dressed, in the hands of a tailor whom he could trust, and who returned the compliment, always self-possessed and unruffled, Rupert Dacre was, as Lord Nantwich had often boasted, a jewel of a private secretary. A man to be trusted with official secrets. A man to be consulted on some knotty points of official by-play. A man to be sought after, and when found, made a note of, in any case requiring delicate diplomatic handling on the part of a subordinate officer. A man with broad moral shoulders for a superior's faults to rest upon; and, above all, a man not likely to bring forward his own merits into undue or premature prominence. A man, in fact, perfectly willing to play second fiddle until the leader's baton was within his grasp, but then, only too likely to fling it at the *çi-devant* leader's head. He looked it all—every bit of it—on the morning after the dinner, sitting in his private office, with the surroundings of official dandyism around him in every shape. He had come down to the office at his usual time, and certainly looked none the worse for the previous evening's amusement. He had done an hour's writing with his usual ease and rapidity, had sorted and arranged a variety of correspondence, and while Bob Calverly was being driven to his office, sat back in a comfortable but intensely official arm-chair, his head resting against the back, and his hands clasped tightly behind his head. The important part of his official work was done, and he was thinking. Not, so far as outward appearance went, unpleasantly thinking; those who did not know the man's real nature might have surmised the reverse, for the eyes were full of their usual calm indifference, and the mouth as inclined to smile as ever.

"I wonder," so ran his thoughts, "what, setting aside any romantic feeling for either of the two women evidently concerned, can be made out of this Chatteris business. Surely something. Let me take a dioramic, or rather dramatic, view of the situation and the characters. The

first is striking, and the latter important. Enter first, Mr. Saville Chatteris; well, well; it requires very little reflection to tell me what sort of a part his is. Then enter Lieutenant Fred Chatteris, who, however, exit so soon that he is not worth thinking about. Then enter Mr. Cyril Chatteris and Mr. Bob Calverly, and about these two I am not half so easy in my mind, for they are evidently the lovers of the piece. As for the women, there is Lady Loughborough, dangerous, but perfectly manageable; Kate Ffrench, charming, but with a tendency to perverted ideas in the direction of her affections; and, last of all, the soubrette, or rather—for she is a cut above that—the little thing who so confidently calls herself Mrs. Chatteris. By Jove! I knew Master Cyril was a sly dog enough, but I really didn't think he had the pluck, or the *nous* either, for an affair of that kind. Hang me!" muttered the young secretary, half aloud, as one of his hands was unclasped and fell carelessly on his knee, "if I think he has, even now. She was very confident about it, too, coming down to his office in that way after him. A sign of intense conscious innocence or equally intense utter brazenness; which of the two remains to be seen. For I *will* see; I, Rupert Dacre, *will* see more of the little thing who calls herself Mrs. Chatteris! And yet, it must be only calling, for the fellow is no fool; and he must have seen that the other girl loves him. I thought, when I caught them in the library, that she had refused him, but I have seen other things since, and I am inclined to think now that it was nothing of the kind. No, I don't think Master Cyril would stand a bad chance there at all; and surely, with such a prize as that in view, he wouldn't run any risk of getting into a scrape, even with such a pretty girl as the little claimant to the honour of his name. Honour, indeed!—I'm not a woman, thank heaven! but I wouldn't, if I were one, be *his* wife for something. Touching Mr. Bob Calverly, he's spooney enough in that quarter, too, but the odds are awfully long against him. Of Kate Ffrench, herself, my only feeling at present is one of curiosity as to her probable fortune. She is a nice girl, and would do uncommonly well with a little good training, and that's what neither of the other

two are up to giving her. He's not a bad fellow, the Australian; but not much of a hand, I should say, at that sort of work. Not, by any means, a bad sort of fellow. Well in, too;—well in. I wonder whether he would bleed under a judicious lancet. That last pull into me was a trifle heavier than I thought, and unless something comes off at the Derby, it will be a hard squeeze with your obedient servant, Rupert Dacre."

A hard squeeze indeed. Harder, perhaps, than anyone looking at the self-satisfied, self-reliant face of the young secretary would imagine. Rupert Dacre was not a man to let Gath and Askelon generally know of his grievances; but there were one or two among the initiated who could have told a little about the pencilled mysteries of his last season's betting book. There are many men who, without being known in the ring, or at the corner, as household words, go in for a good deal of serious betting; and Rupert Dacre had been one of these. *Bell's Life* had not, certainly, chronicled his losses; no "Peeping Tom," or touting "Nimrod" of the *Field*, had ever hinted at his having dropped heavily on anything. But there had been a few bills done by him in the city. Bills done by a man known to be possessed of no great fortune or expectations; accepted by men whose names were not—Rupert was wise then—very prominently before the world, and discounted by other men whose ideas of lawful interest were tolerably commensurate with their appreciation of the risk. Bills received, too, at higher rates of interest, some still unpaid, and with not much hope of cash coming in to take them up.

He was not an extravagant man, by any means, for all his luxurious lodgings, and perfect dressing; but his income was small, his official salary moderate, and his expectations almost below zero. What wonder then if he, too, on that morning had his troubles buzzing about his ears, in spite of his calm eyes, smiling mouth, and easy lounging attitude. Charley Ryle could have told something about him too. Could have given some reason, perhaps, for a sudden knitting of the eyebrows, and tightening of the lip, as the calm-eyes fell for a moment on a note lying on the table, bearing that individual's

signature, and addressed to Rupert Dacre, Esq. He has taken it up in his hand, and we can read it over his shoulder.

"DEAR SIR."

"Confound his familiarity!" mutters Dacre, as his eye runs over the letter, "it will be 'Dear Dacre' soon, I suppose."

"Your renewed bill for £470 falls due on the 3rd of next month. I need scarcely remind you of the necessity for taking it up, as I have too much cash out just now to renew again.

"Yours faithfully,

"CHARLES RYLE."

"Confounded cue-chalking brute!" again muttered the secretary, throwing the letter into the fire, as he heard a rapid footstep coming up the stairs; "who the deuce can I go to now? I wonder if Cyril—but he's no good unless I can get him under my thumb. Catch Master Cyril helping anyone unless forced. Perhaps that Australian fellow might do a trifle. They say he has got lots of money. Anyhow he drops it readily enough. Suppose we try——"

"Mr. Robert Calverly wishes to see you, sir," said a messenger, quietly opening the door, and putting in an official head in the most officially humble manner.

"Show him in," said Dacre, mechanically assisting the destruction of the letter by a vicious dig at the fire, and the next minute he was shaking hands with the man to whom he had thought of applying the pecuniary lancet of friendly bill-backing.

"Ah! Calverly, my dear fellow, how are you? A little seedy, after last night, eh? I don't feel quite the thing myself. That room in Jermyn Street that we know of is the very devil for gas and headache."

"I *am* seedy," replied Bob, feeling very nearly as awkward with the fashionable secretary as he had done with the good-natured man-of-business. He took a chair, however, and tried to look as comfortable as everything about him. "I never smoke here myself," went on Dacre, "but that is no reason why you should not. You will find some fine cigars in that box on the table behind

you. At least, they ought to be good; old Nantwich smokes them, and he is no bad judge."

But Bob declined smoking for once. He was new to borrowing, this young man, even from his own set, and the feeling that he had come to do something like it, was very nearly as unpleasant in Westminster as it had been in Austin Friars.

A second or so more of silence. Both men were thinking of the same subject, and both looked at the fire, deriving an equal amount of consolation therefrom. At last Dacre led off.

"Well, Calverly, I'm very glad to see you, but as this is my office, and not my private house, you will, I am sure, excuse my asking in what way I can serve you? Surely you can have no political business? Besides"—with a bland smile—"we don't go in for the 'colonies' here. The other street for that work. But even there I may be of some use to you."

Had a colonial appointment been in Rupert Dacre's gift at the moment, and had his visitor been the possessor of anything approaching to a decent amount of "ready," who can say that there might not have been a little case of jobbery to be growled at. These things are done sometimes, though men still prate of political honesty and fair dealing. For the moment, indeed, Rupert was half inclined to believe he had made a good guess at his new friend's object, and his heart beat high. But only to be undeceived too soon. Only to be baulked at the fence of circumstances, before which so many "bold riders" have been pounded. Bob Calverly had no inclination to ask for a colonial appointment, and still less had he any money to part with just at that moment. He looked at the fire for a moment again, and saw nothing, looked into the unmoved face of his diplomatic acquaintance and saw, if possible, less. It was very clear that the only way to get anything out of Mr. Rupert Dacre was to ride at him straight. In matters of money, men of fashion are very like men of business. A trifle harder sometimes; and Bob saw by the secretary's manner that the best plan was to come to the point at once. And he did so only in time to prevent a similar move on the part of the secretary.

"Look here, Dacre," he said, leaning forward in his chair, and speaking with more emphasis than the town-bred diplomat had been accustomed to, "I am in a deuce of a mess. Boggled, in fact. Not a regular breakdown, of course," he went on, as, in spite of all his training, Dacre's face underwent a sudden phantasmagorian change. "Only a bog for the time; but it's over the axles, and unless I can get a pull out, I shall be more inconvenienced than I care to say."

The metaphorical *resumé* of Mr. Robert Calverly's financial position would have been certainly more intelligible to a bushman who had, during his sojourn in the antipodean land of *contretemps*, gone in for bullock-driving, than it was to the private secretary of Lord Nantwich. But it was clear enough for that gentleman to understand that the bleeding of Mr. Robert Calverly was an operation not likely to come off on that occasion, and that assistance would be asked, instead of offered. He was equal to the emergency, however, as he always had been. No one had ever heard of Rupert Dacre as a particularly dashing man in any particular line, by flood or field; but more than one man had expressed a decided opinion that Rupert was all there in a pinch. And he was so now. Another man might have been nonplussed, overpowered at the sudden change in the rôle he was called upon to play, but not so with him. Like lightning, there flashed through his mind all he had heard or seen in connection with Robert Calverly, his relationship to Sir Valentine Yoicks, the wealthy landowner of Loamshire, who had been heard more than once to say that "Bob was as fine a fellow as ever crossed a horse;" his father's much-talked-of wealth and position in a land where both had influence, as they have everywhere; his certainty of succeeding to something more than a good fortune; and last, but not least, the many ways in which he could be useful to that person most to be considered in such a case—Mr. Rupert Dacre. The secretary had made up his mind almost as soon as Calverly had finished speaking, and Bob reaped the benefit of it. Had the young Australian been a younger son, with nothing *in esse* or *posse*, Dacre would have paused before giving a direct refusal until he

had thoroughly decided that the petitioner could be of no possible use to him at some time or other. In this case the odds were very long in favour of the petitioner, and Dacre answered accordingly. Answered with a slight, very slight, assumption of the *blasé* and paternal manner that conduced so strongly to the secretary's influence in male society.

"I am very glad, indeed, that you have come to me in this way, Calverly," he said—"very glad; indeed, I might almost say, flattered. Now listen, old fellow"—the white hand was laid very gently on the Australian's knee—"listen, and don't be offended. Is it money you want, or advice?"

"A little of both," answered Bob, completely made easy by the other's frankness of tone and manner. "I will tell you exactly how it is."

And in a few words he repeated to Dacre the case he had so unsuccessfully made out to Mr. Fleece.

Dacre saw it all in a moment. The agent's scruples, Calverly's position, and how he might turn it to his own ends.

"I could easily ask Sir Valentine for the money," said Bob, "but the old fellow has been so kind, and, to tell you the truth, Dacre—I dare say you have heard something of my family history—I don't think my father would fancy my going to him."

"I can easily understand that," he replied, with his airiest diplomatic smile. "We see so much of that in our line. The fact is, Calverly, you just want to raise the money for the time, and will be able to set it all straight out of your next trans-oceanic budget?"

"Just so," replied Bob.

"Well, you have been frank with me, as one gentleman should be with another, and I will be so with you. I can't lend you the money myself, for the best of reasons, that I have not got it."

Bob's face fell. There was just a glimmering of an unpromising look-out in this instance, too. Rupert saw the fallen countenance in a moment, and smiled blandly, as he went on.

"What a deliciously Arcadian fellow you are, Calverly. Surely you never expected that I had fifteen hundred pounds to spare?"

"Candidly speaking, I didn't," said Bob, more truthfully than politely. "At least, I didn't at first. It was your manner made me think you were going to offer what after all I had no right to ask. I came here more to ask your advice than anything else, and my excuse for doing that must be my utter strangeness in London."

"Of course, my dear fellow"—with a smile more paternally *blasé* than ever—"and I am more flattered at your doing that than if you had asked me for money. I can assure you I am. Money I can't give you—advice I can. Will you take it?"

"Will I not?"

"Well, then, oh! my Melibœus of the colonies, listen. It must be known to you, as well as to most young men—even though their interests and pursuits are of a pastoral and, therefore, innocent nature—that men, like theatres, are often filled with what is technically called 'paper.'"

A metaphor rather beyond Bob, who didn't answer.

"In other words," went on Rupert, "when a man hasn't money, and his friends are in the same predicament, what can they do?"

"Do a bill, I suppose," replied Calverly, whose inexperience by no means amounted to positive verdure.

"Just so. Their joint efforts are applied to the sending up of an aerial messenger, or, as the city men say, the 'flying of a kite.' That is what I should suggest to you. I can't lend you what I have not got—money, but I can and will lend you my name, which I flatter myself will be good for fifteen hundred pounds."

Flattery, indeed, Mr. Rupert Dacre; that is, unless well backed, as it was likely to be in the present instance.

To Bob, however, the speaker had uttered the words of truth, and, above all, of the most generous kindness.

"I'm sure I can't say how much I am obliged to you, old fellow," he almost stammered, in the excess of his gratitude. "If ever you—if ever you—"

"Of course," replied the still paternally smiling secretary, with the old *blasé* assumption creeping over his face and manner—"of course, my dear boy, if ever I want the same, you'll be ready. I knew that without your saying it. And, now, doesn't it strike you, Calverly, that the sooner we get over this matter the better?"

"The sooner the better for me," said Bob, his old gaiety coming back to him. "But where shall we go—to the city?"

"Well, I don't think we'll patronise the city. I always prefer doing business with the West End when I can. Are there not children of the lost tribes who have pitched their tents amongst us?"

Bob suddenly stopped himself in his task of pulling on his glove, and looked at his accommodating acquaintance.

"Children of the lost tribes! You don't mean Jews, Dacre?"

"Well, I don't in this instance. I merely applied the term to money-lenders generally. But why do you ask? Have you objection to the financial Hebrew?"

"Yes, I have," said Bob. "I've made a solemn vow never to have anything to do with them. I wouldn't borrow anything from a Jew under any circumstances."

"Well, it's lucky for you," answered the secretary, with a sneer he could not repress, "that I happen to know an accommodating Christian; for, generally speaking, the proud descendant of Abraham is the only man who can supply the 'balm of Gilead' on the terms we require it. Are you ready?"

"Quite," said Bob, and they went downstairs.

* * * * *

"Charlie Ryle," of Jermyn Street, and Charles Ryle, Esq., of Hampton Court, were two different persons in one respect at least. "Charlie Ryle" always took money; Charles Ryle, Esq., lent it, that is to the initiated.

"It's no good going to Jermyn Street, Bob," said Dacre, as they reached the street. I suppose those nags of yours will run us down to Hampton Court in the proverbial jiffy. Is this your cabby? Jump in, my boy. Limmer's."

Mr. Bob Calverly's nags were equal to the occasion, and it was not long before the two gentlemen were shown into Mr. Charles Ryle's "study"—a handsome, but slightly over-furnished room, with bookcase too evidently seldom opened, comfortable reading chairs, a most orthodox

writing-table, and a bureau positively redolent of cheque books.

Mr. Charles Ryle made his appearance almost before they had time to look round the room.

"Ah! Mr. Dacre," he said "glad to see you, uncommonly. What good wind blows you here? Too late for luncheon, but not too late for a bottle of that tippie you tried last time. Allow me to ring the bell."

A pleasant-looking man enough, this ringer of the hospitable bell and suggester of the exhilarating "tippie"; tall, stout, rubicund, and cheery-faced, and yet one at whose door lay the ruin of more young fellows than the good angel of truth would like to count. He had a wife and children, too—though none of his "city" friends had ever seen them—was kind in his domestic relations, and even went to church and put money in the plate. The clergyman at Hampton Court spoke very well of Mr. Ryle, and had the most unlimited confidence in the respectability of his "business in the city." Of the fifty or so who did doubt, none lived in Hampton Court, and had they done so, they would probably have soon found excellent reasons for holding their tongues.

The bell was answered, "tippie" was brought, cigars were produced and lighted. Mr. Ryle's cigars were more than respectable if his business was not.

"Capital nags those of yours, Mr. Dacre," said the host, in the midst of a general conversation.

Rupert Dacre was a great deal too 'cute to come to the point at once.

"I wish they were mine, Ryle. Haven't you seen Mr. Calverly driving them about town. Charlie Ryle had seen Mr. Calverly in his own rooms in Jermyn Street. He had heard, too, of Mr. Calverly at Limmer's, and knew quite as much of the young Australian's position as Rupert was likely to tell him. He had got up his "business in the city," and his house at Hampton Court, through that very useful habit of knowing all he could about everybody.

"Ah, Mr. Calverly's, are they?" he said, with a smile. "Deuced good steppers, I should say. But I suppose you're too well used to good cattle, Mr. Calverly, to think them anything very wonderful?"

"Oh, they are good enough," said Bob, who was more anxious to see the ascension of his kite than to hear the praises of his horses.

"Good enough to take us back to town in time for dinner, old fellow," said Dacre; "for I intend to dine with you, and, therefore, Ryle, the sooner we finish our business with you the better."

"Ah! business," said the man of respectability; "what a head you have for business, Mr. Dacre. I thought you had come to have a quiet look at the place, and might stop to dinner."

"Can't, indeed; or should be most happy," answered Rupert, with some truth, for Ryle's cook was known to be a good one, and his cellar unimpeachable; but it was not his game that Bob should see too much of the money-lender. It might weaken his own influence.

"Well, I know you of old, Mr. Dacre," said Ryle; "if you won't, you won't. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," said Dacre, "for me. For Mr. Calverly you can write a cheque for fifteen hundred pounds. I will back his bill."

"You will back his bill?" said Ryle, fixing his eyes for a moment full on Dacre's face, and then as suddenly fixing them on Bob's; "well, that's very friendly of you, Mr. Dacre, and I am sure I am very glad to be able to oblige a friend of yours. You won't grumble at the terms, I suppose? Business is business, you know, Mr. Calverly."

Mr. Ryle's house might not be quite so well established as that of Messrs. Fleece, Pack & Co., but his way of doing business was, to Bob's notions, decidedly more agreeable.

"Well, your terms, Ryle; Mr. Calverly and I are rather new in this way. What are your terms?"

Mr. Ryle's appreciation of Mr. Rupert Dacre's newness was so intense that he absolutely laughed over it, as he said, quite as good-humouredly as Mr. Fleece, but with far less apparent 'cuteness, "Oh, twenty per cent., including commission; that won't break you, Mr. Calverly, eh?"

Bob thought himself lucky in the extreme, and warmly

denied all chance of any rupture consequent on such a scale of charges.

"Just so! just so!" went on Mr. Ryle, humming an air from "Il Barbiere," as he opened a drawer and rapidly wrote a cheque; "there you are, Mr. Calverly. Kindly fill up this bill; draw on Mr. Dacre, he will accept, etcetera, etcetera; and *that* is over. Three months—twenty per cent.—Robert Calverly—Rupert Dacre. Right, sir; right as the bank. And now, gentlemen, another glass."

Bob rose to fill his, and so doing, did not notice a rapid movement by which Dacre, who had been apparently scribbling carelessly on a piece of paper, tossed it over to Ryle. Whether by accident or intention, the paper had a stamp on it. Many gentlemen do scribble carelessly even on stamped paper, even diplomatic sentences.

The one more glass was finished, fresh cigars were lighted, and the gentlemen strolled into the porch.

"One moment, Mr. Dacre," said Ryle, as Bob was buttoning up his great coat; "there is a little matter about a passport for a friend of mine. Perhaps you will give me a little advice about it."

"Excuse me, Bob," said Dacre, and he and Ryle re-entered the library.

Ryle's manner was completely changed now; so changed, that, had Bob seen it, he might have preferred Mr. Fleece's. His eye was very cold and keen, and there was no smile on his lip. "Safe, I suppose, Mr. Dacre?" he said, looking the secretary steadily in the face.

"You know that as well as I do, Ryle," said Rupert, returning the look, "or your cheque wouldn't be in his pocket."

"Perhaps not, Mr. Dacre," was the quiet answer; "is his tether a long one?"

"Long enough to see you —; but I daresay you'll see him again. He is as fond of horses as you are; and if I were to give him a hint of that dark one you've been keeping so snug, he would be dropping down here pretty often. He told me the other day he should like to put in a good thing for the Chester. Poor beggar! he'll learn better some day, I suppose."

"Under your hand he certainly will, Mr. Dacre; but look here, that horse is for sale, with all his engagements. Perhaps Mr. Calverly might buy him; it would suit my book to a T if he did."

"Shouldn't wonder if he were to," replied Dacre carelessly. "I'll speak to him about it. It's as good a thing as he could do; for, to do you justice, Ryle, you are about as gentle a Philistine as he could hit upon."

"So I am," said Ryle dryly, leading the way into the hall. "Good-bye, Mr. Dacre, and"—just as they reached the door,—“Oh! by the by, that little renewal of yours is all right; and after adding it on to your note of to-day, I had better hand you *this*, to make it all right. Good-bye, Mr. Dacre. Good-bye, Mr. Calverly—a pleasant drive.”

Had any one directly offered Mr. Rupert Dacre a commission for bringing a customer to a money-lender and horse-dealer, a blush might have risen even to the unaccustomed cheek of the imperturbable diplomatist; for all that, *this* was a cheque for three hundred pounds.

"Well," said Calverly, "That little matter is over—thanks to your kindness. As soon as I have squared up for last night, I am off for Loamshire."

CHAPTER XV.

A DOUBTFUL POSITION.

"SHALL you be home to dinner this evening, Cyril?"

Mr. Cyril Chatteris, formerly of Dym Street, and now of Acacia Road, St. John's Wood, had dined out four nights running, and Carry was getting a little angry about it. Surely he might be a little more with her, considering what a lonely life she led. But as her mother had often told her, men had no consideration, and Cyril appeared to possess that manly qualification to a greater extent than his pretty wife fancied.

"Will you be home to dinner this evening, Cyril?" she repeated.

Repeated it to a man who was lounging carelessly back

in an arm-chair, reading a periodical with an intensity that, to a wife not married a month, was provoking. He looked up to answer, however, in a manner quite as unsatisfactory as the scene it conveyed.

"Can't say, really; but don't wait for me!"

Poor Carry had got used to this answer now, and so made no reply, but went away into her little drawing-room, and began, with an uncomfortable sensation about her throat, to try what consolation might be got out of a pet canary.

But though a canary is pretty enough, and perhaps interesting enough in the abstract, there is not much that is consoling in the feeding of it to a woman who begins to doubt whether she has chosen wisely. The white fingers were duly pecked at as the sugar was administered; the canary did his best in the way of a song, but still the canary wasn't her husband, and Carry felt very lonely indeed. Perhaps, if she were to play, Cyril might come in and talk to her as he used to do. So she sat down at the piano—her mother had been so proud of her playing, and so had Cyril professed to be in the days of their short courtship—and, with rather unsteady fingers, began a waltz, played it for a few minutes with no result, changed it to a gallop, then tried a waltz again, and at last commenced a song, in the middle of which, Cyril put his head in at the door, and, carelessly saying "good-bye," went back into the passage, through the garden, and out into the road.

Carry shut the piano, watched her husband as he walked slowly up the road, tried to play with the canary again, and ended by throwing herself into an arm-chair and crying bitterly.

Poor child! Only one month married, and crying bitterly. Naturally affectionate, her separation from her mother had intensified her feelings for her husband, and she loved him very dearly indeed. But love can be tried too far sometimes; and to be neglected one month after marriage may fairly be called a trial.

And neglected, and to some extent disillusioned, Carry had certainly been. Just as no man is a hero to his *valet de chambre*, so a good many men are by no means

heroes to their wives. Cyril Chatteris was eminently one of these. The first illusion once gone, he was not a man likely to establish another. Gentlemanly by training, and refined by instinct, his utter selfishness still stood in the way of that perfect good breeding founded on a consideration for the feelings of others.

He did not beat Carry, nor was he ever harsh to her. But he was very often indifferent, occasionally almost rudely so, and he decidedly neglected her. No woman likes to be left alone from eleven in the morning of one day till four or five in the morning of the next; and with Carry this had become a common occurrence. For the first fortnight or so after their settlement in St. John's Wood, Cyril had been all that the girl could desire. He had bought her nice dresses, charming jewellery, a "dear little cottage piano;" and their tiny house was as prettily furnished a dovecote as two birds would care to coo in. Carry would play and sing in the evening, or Cyril would read to her. In the day they would go for long walks or drives into the country, and all went merrily.

But this soon changed, and the most cruel part of it was that the poor girl, with the quick tact of her sex, saw the reason for it—her husband had married beneath him. He felt it, and she could not deny it. In all that was good, and pure, and kindly, the humbly-born woman was as superior to the cold, selfish man who had marred her life by marrying her, even more than he had marred his own—as light is to darkness. But intellectually, and in those indescribable little belongings that breeding alone can teach, the inferiority was on the other side; and the poor loving heart felt and groaned under the burden that had grown out of a fancied paradise of love. When Cyril, in one of his confiding moods, would talk of that world of mind and intellect, to her an unknown land, the poor little listener, trying hard—oh, so hard!—to appreciate what she knew to be utterly beyond her, saw, too clearly, that her husband gradually grew less and less animated, and at last, with a smile of half contemptuous pity, called her a "dear little goose," and took up a book.

No newly-made bride dislikes to be called a "dear little goose" in the abstract, but when the epithet is

evidently intended to convey something of its ordinary meaning, the charm is considerably lessened.

And so there came neglect on one side, pouting and a slight tendency to scold on the other; more neglect—more scolding—reconciliation, followed by more neglect; and then, not scolding, but a sorrowful sense of injured affection, deepening into a feeling that Cyril, with all his intellectual superiority, could neither understand nor appreciate. His wife still loved him very dearly, but his neglect had brought about a habit of reflection, and the wife was beginning to see that, after all, fairy Princes might turn into tyrants, and that her own position was not quite so enchanting as she had imagined. To see, too, that it was rather an anomalous position. In the first days of their marriage, Carry had imagined that Cyril would, when the honeymoon was over, bring some of his friends to see her. Not that she cared about seeing any but him; but the girl had her full share of womanly vanity, and it was only natural that she should like her husband's friends to see how fortunate he had been in his choice. But the honeymoon passed over, and no one came near them. Of his family she had only spoken once to him; and before the dark look that came into his face as she did so, she had sunk into a silence on that subject not since broken. She had no female friends either. Cyril had almost savagely forbidden any correspondence with her mother, and he had expressly told her not to make any acquaintances in the neighbourhood.

At first she had thought this hard; but there was something about her near neighbours that soon made her shrink involuntarily from any attempt to know them.

There were other things, too, that puzzled her about Cyril. He often came home not tipsy exactly, but under the influence of wine; and then he was neither agreeable nor good-tempered. Once or twice, too, he did not come home for two days, and then Carry passed her time in alternate attacks of trembling fear, jealousy, anger, and bitter tears. And still no friends came to see them; she dared not, for fear of offending the husband she still loved, write to her mother, and female adviser she had none. The pretty fairy bower that had looked so charming

in the distance was, in short, a delirium of her own fancy. The fairy Prince who had ridden away with her was too like the false knight who only loved so long as it pleased him, and then selecting a fresh favourite, galloped carelessly away. Like many others, Carry Manton, or, as she was called in the neighbourhood, Mrs. Carter—that being the name in which Cyril had taken the house—had made a sad, sad mistake, and was finding it out only too soon.

Of Cyril Chatteris—Mr. Carter, of St. John's Wood—it can only be said that he was, as certainly he deserved to be, very uneasy in his mind. He had reconciled his wife to the change of name and retirement, by strongly drawn representations of the fearful consequences of his father's anger, and the frightened girl, unsupported by her mother, had readily yielded to his wishes. But for all that he lived in a covert dread of a discovery. Some of his friends might see Carry, and the affair might leak out. So he engaged bachelor lodgings in the Albany, and occasionally slept there, taking every care only to go out to St. John's Wood in the most unpretending manner and whenever he could, after dusk.

He went out, however, with Carry, as little as he could, and soon became so exacting and disagreeable in this respect that the girl scarcely ever stirred out; and then she drooped, and the fresh cheek began to look slightly pale and wan, and Cyril became more nervous than ever. Was this fear of discovery never to end? Should he take her abroad, or what should he do? Day by day the worry, the strain on his mind, grew more and more heavy; and at last, finding that his balance at his banker's would bear the expense, he determined to take Carry abroad.

This determination made, he came home one evening in a decidedly better humour, and told Carry—in words and tones so like those she had once listened to, that they made her cheek glow and her heart flutter—that he was going to take her on the Continent.

Poor Carry, worn out with loneliness and pining, was delighted at the chance of a change; and as, leaning on Cyril's arm, she walked round and round the garden, the fairy Prince seemed to have come back to the bower he had so long deserted.

"How you shiver, darling!" said Cyril, as they stood by the garden gate. "Let me get you a shawl."

He had not spoken or acted so considerably for days now; and as she stood by the gate waiting for him, Carry felt that all her old happiness was returning.

The sound of horses' feet was heard on the road. She looked up mechanically. Two gentlemen rode slowly by; one she recognised as the gentleman who had once trod on her dress, and followed her. He fixed his eyes on her with the old meaning look; and, as before, she coloured and turned away.

As the riders rode slowly past the gate, Carry caught a few words spoken in an off-hand and careless manner, which made her start with shame and indignation. When the import of the wicked words became clearer, she realised to the full the horror of her doubtful position, felt that she had been outraged through the heedless conduct of her husband. She felt sick at heart as the suspicion flashed across her that, perhaps, the report had originated from Cyril himself. She could scarcely bring herself to believe this, although his conduct of late gave good grounds for such suspicion.

She determined to question him directly, but as he appeared in the garden with the shawl hanging over his arm, and with more of the old light in his eyes than had shone there for many days, she could not find it in her heart to accuse him. He wrapt the shawl tenderly around her, gave her his arm, and, as they walked, he spoke about the intended trip. All Carry's interest in the continental tour was gone—she could scarcely answer the questions that Cyril put to her.

Much as she tried to banish the dark thought, it still remained vividly impressed upon her brain. Wearied and tortured, she at last pleaded cold, and requested Cyril to return to the house.

As they walked up the little gravel path leading to the door, Carry resolved that she would at any price pay a visit to Dym Street, and consult her mother as to the proper course she should take.

CHAPTER XVI.

DACRE PROVES "QUITE THE GENTLEMAN."

It might have been thought that Mrs. Manton would have wept and bewailed herself at her daughter's departure; on the contrary, she was somewhat elated after the first few days. Women, especially women in the nineteenth century, are apt to regard the present as all in all; and the worldly widow comforted herself with the reflection that her dear Carry—that delicate little bait with which she had angled so successfully—was safely married to a young man who, though "no fool," was easily to be moulded to the will of the conquering wife.

She was not a poetical old lady, this Dym Street lodging-house keeper; so, though fond and proud of her daughter, she did not neglect her household duties, in order to weep with picturesque grief in the back parlour, but set her face resolutely to the task of finding out the history and prospects of her son-in-law. This was not so easy a matter. Cyril's friends were not her friends, nor his people her people; she could not extract information in the course of a morning call, but, failing access to that modern strappado, she had another—an evening tea.

Mrs. Manton projected a tea-party. She would ask Binns and Bland. She doubted if Bland would come, but Binns she could count on. That poor youth had been undergoing tortures which seemed to him terrible. Despite Bland's consolations, which did not in the least console, he could not tear the image of his love from his plebeian heart. In vain he wrote, read, and wrapped up sugar. In vain did he think of Chatterton (who perished in his prime), of Shelley, of Byron. In vain did he attend working men's meetings, and speak there with such rude eloquence as nature and the "Enfield Speaker" permitted him. In vain was he made secretary to a branch of a Working Men's Association, (object, "the Bloated Aristocrat"). In vain did he assume cynicism, and quote poetry. Carry's ghost haunted him; her dark eyes dazzled his waking sight, her slight form flitted through his nightly

visions, her white hands plucked back his soaring soul, and would not let it soar. So Binns grovelled. He confessed that he grovelled. Confessed it with much heart sickness and gnashing of teeth. The sun of his passion melted the wax of his Icarian wings, and he tumbled to prosaic earth. If you can imagine the feelings of a poet who cannot write poetry, you can realise Binns' condition. He agonised to write, but his agonies were in vain; he tossed and tumbled on his narrow bed, and vowed that he would make the world recognise the name of Binns—alas! the world went on its worldly way, and Binns wrapped up his sugar in silence.

When he received Mrs. Manton's invitation, you may be sure that he was delighted. He should hear about his Love again; he should be able to scowl and affect indifference, and to nourish his Passion. Binns revelled in capital letters, and never thought save in heroics. He would go to the party and be miserable to his heart's content, he inwardly vowed. Perhaps, by some wild chance, the Beloved might be there, and then—O, bliss!—he could look the other way all the evening. Self-torment is a luxury to lovers. I have known young men dress themselves with feverish delight to go to a ball, in order that they might persistently dance with other damsels than the Adored; indeed, one young friend of mine who, making three guineas a week and spending ten, goes through life under the happy delusion that he is earning his bread by literature, has walked five miles in the rain in order that he might pass through the room where his love was placed for sale, and pretend not to see her. Binns was an adept at self-torment, and promised himself much pleasure from the contemplation of his woe.

When he arrived, however, he was somewhat unpleasantly astonished at seeing a "swell" lounging on one of Mrs. Manton's uncomfortable ottomans. He turned to Bland, who was preparing—good genial soul—to beam gratitude upon his hostess, and was not reassured by the puzzled expression which suddenly overspread that gentleman's face.

"It's Dacre! What can he want here?"

"I know him," whispered Binns eagerly, as he pulled

off his coat in the passage; "he's a friend of His, Mr. Bland, and he came down to the shop one day to ask after him."

Mr. Rupert Dacre was in great force evidently. He was faultlessly dressed in the quietest of purple and fine linen. His social stop was on, and he was discoursing eloquent music.

"He had just dropped in by the request of his friend Chatteris, to enquire about a portmanteau. No portmanteau here? Oh! ha, ha! Mistake of his poor friend—young married men, you know, *do* forget these things. Well, never mind" (taking out watch). "He had plenty of time; was engaged to look in at the French Ambassador's in the course of the evening, and—what?"

"Stop to tea! My dear madam! Delighted—but urgent business; unhappy private secretaries to ministers, you know—Well, really now, if you persist, my dear madam."

Mrs. Manton was radiant. The very man for her purpose. She was thirsting for news of her son-in-law, and here was a messenger dropped immediately at her feet. Moreover the vista of good society was opening before her. This bearded gentleman was evidently someone. His conversation showed that; and she trembled with ecstasy as she heard him accept her invitation to "tea with us." I think, however, that the fact of the matter was, that the astute Rupert had started from home that evening with the express purpose of stopping to tea, and that the other-wise wily widow had fallen into his snare.

Binns scowled at him; but even Binns, the radical and poet, was not proof against the consummate ease and genial smiles of the "bloated aristocrat." "Smiles and small talk are our stock-in-trade, and we have the cads on the hip there, my boy," would Dacre say. "They may *think* as much as they like, but they can't *talk*, you know." As to Bland, Dacre overwhelmed him in a moment. "My dear Mr. Bland, we have met before in public but never in private—permit me to shake hands with you. I assure you that your name has been known to me longer than you imagine. Ah! Mrs. Manton, dabblers in literature like-myself are forced to acknowledge—but I won't flatter, my dear sir."

Bland stammered something. He never liked the too genial friend of his chief, and detected the false ring in his complimentary metal, but what could he say?

"Mr. Dacre, Mr. Binns—Mr. Binns, Mr. Dacre," exclaimed the widow, in that double-jointed fashion of introduction which prevails among ladies of her stamp and education.

"Mr. Binns! Dear me, how strange. I am meeting all the lions to-night. Pray, my dear madam, is this the Mr. Binns whose speech concerning 'Manhood Suffrage' created such sensation?"

Binns was astonished.

"Oh, we know everything, my dear sir," says Dacre airily. "I had particulars of the speech the next morning. You are dangerous fellows, you young democrats—dangerous fellows. Wheales was speaking of you the other day."

Binns flushed with joy. To be called a "dangerous fellow" by such an accomplished dandy as the man before him was pleasant to the senses, but to be told that the great Wheales, the inspired Wheales, the reformed and reforming Wheales, had spoken of him, was almost too great to bear, and for an instant the name of Binns seemed to be inscribed on the blazing scroll of fame, concerning which Bland had discoursed so eloquently.

The shabby reporter had retired to a corner of the room, and, after rumpling his hair wildly with his knuckly hands, had subsided into a discussion upon crochet and Balfe's music, with Miss Perkin, a red-nosed young lady, who was considered "very genteel" in private circles. Two more young ladies, one frigid and severely aristocratic, named Jittlebury; and the other, plump and rosy, with dove-like eyes and stubby fingers, whose papa taught music in the classic regions of the Edgeware Road, sat together, and admired Mr. Dacre, the chubby one tittering at intervals. The tea proceeded merrily. Bland began to thaw, and talked really well. Dacre flirted outrageously with all the females; and Binns having had his life made a burden to him by reason of buttered toast, and the necessity for "handing" the same, had almost forgotten his wrongs in listening to his enemy the "swell."

As Dacre had said, "small talk was his stock-in-trade."

He rattled away upon all imaginable subjects, and never once winced when Mrs. Manton sucked the butter from her fingers, or Miss Jittlebury choked in attempting to drink her tea in what she considered to be an aristocratic manner. His stories of the manners and customs of the aristocracy were delightful, and the exquisite manner in which he described Lord Chalkstone's flirtation with Lady Emily Sanssou, at once convinced the party that he was what Miss Jittlebury termed *hon famheel* with the British aristocracy. By and by, a song was suggested, and Dacre gravely led the fair Jittlebury to the cracked piano, and bent his graceful figure over her chair, while that virgin warbled the songs of the secretary's boyhood, under the happy delusion that she was amusing him. He bore it all with the most perfect fortitude, and it was not until Miss J., assisted by Binns, informed the company that she was "going far away, far away from Porjinette," that Dacre crossed the room and sat down on the rickety sofa, which supported the noble form of the widow Manton.

"And when did you hear last from your daughter, Mrs. Manton?" said he.

The widow was taken aback. She did not like to say that she had never heard from her daughter since that daughter had been spirited away from her protecting arms by the infuriate son-in-law; she could not openly tell him that the very purpose for which she had asked him to stay was to discover where that daughter was living. She did not like to appear at a loss for an answer, so she took the usual refuge of a woman—she lied.

"Last Wednesday," says she.

Dacre, ignorant of all things, was put off his guard by this sudden reply. "Oh, indeed! Ah! I suppose she comes to see you frequently. St. John's Wood is within easy walking distance."

Not a muscle of the wary widow's face relaxed as she heard the intelligence she longed for.

"Yes," she replied; "but Mr. Chatteris is so much occupied with his literary labours that he seldom goes hout, and he don't like his wife to travel about alone, which is nateral, more especial as she is a young thing, which never knew what it is to want a mother's protecting

harm, though of course a husband's is very similar if not more so."

"Exactly," replied Rupert. "Mr. Chatteris is very hard-worked."

"He is, indeed; what with his papers and his money matters, he haint a moment to hisself, and that's the reason why I see so little of him. Ah! well—none but a mother knows a mother's feelin's," added she, with a heavy sigh.

Dacre said, "He supposed not," and fell to thinking. "Chatteris's literary labours." Then he was writing again. Moreover, the "little thing" *was* "Mrs. Chatteris" evidently, or, at all events, her mother thought she was. Strange sort of scrape Master Cyril had got into. He smiled sweetly as he thought what a great discovery he had made; and, on the song ceasing, thanked the Jittlebury with such *empressement*, that Hope began to flutter in that maiden's gentle breast, and to tell his flattering tale with whispered hints of St. George's and "good society."

But the widow had not done with her guest yet.

"Shall we 'ave a game er whist? I know you play, Mr. Dacre. Joolier, my love" (to the chubby one), "git out the cards! Mr. Bland, come and play a rubber."

Dacre for the moment was overcome. The widow was irresistible, and before he could frame a decent excuse for departure, he found himself seated at a very shaky table with the widow as a partner, and "Joolier" cutting with that lady for the privilege of dealing.

The Mantonian idea of whist was somewhat opposed to that entertained by Mrs. Sarah Battle. She laughed and talked, and recovered cards, and marked points which she had no right to mark, and yet played with a certain boldness and defiance that, when joined to the prudence of Dacre, proved beyond measure successful. Bland and the unhappy chubby one, who revoked three times, and trumped poor Bland's trick twice, were mulct in the sum of four and sixpence each, to Mrs. Manton's great delight; Dacre behaving "quite the gentleman," and gallantly refusing "Joolier's" money with a bow and a compliment that made the virginal ears of the fair Jittlebury tingle with jealousy.

During the progress of the game, however, Dacre elicited that Binns had been a devoted lover of Carry's ere Chatteris appeared, and that he was still supposed to be suffering the pangs of despised love. He also found out that the marriage had taken place quietly, and that Cyril had been obliged to go down to his brother's funeral on the same day.

"Accounts for the young cub being so melancholy," thought he. "I wonder what he was about in the library with that Ffrench girl. My supposition was wrong—he couldn't have proposed to her. Hum! Affairs look complicated. If that old humbug Chatteris was to discover that his son had married this girl, he would probably cut him off with the proverbial shilling. I wonder to whom he'd leave his money. The Ffrench girl, I suppose. Ah!—he ought to have saved money, too, old Chatteris. I might do worse, upon my soul. I must confess, however, that for my part, I much prefer Mrs. Chatteris. Bad taste, perhaps, but by Jove, the day I saw her in the garden she looked divine. If I was sure that she wasn't married, I'd—but no, my wild days are over. I must go in for position, and all that sort of thing. What a glorious old tartar the mother is! I have stumbled on strange society. That young donkey, Binns, for example, and that prosy old blockhead, Bland. Perhaps, I might make some use of Master Binns. He is just the sort of cad who knows all about the working of these miserable meetings. Mr. Binns!"

Binns bent forward.

"I am going to ask you rather a rude question, but I wish you would let me have your address. Sometimes we official fellows hear of things—you understand—"

Binns did not understand the least in the world, but visions of official fame and political intrigue rose before him, as he blushed and handed the smiling secretary a limp card, whereon was printed the address of his employing grocer.

"Mr. Bland lives with me," he said, as if that fact cast a halo of intellect round the spot.

"Oh, indeed! Ah! very pleasant. Literary chat, eh? Two congenial minds! Then, a letter sent to this address will always find you?"

"Always."

"Upon my word, I am very much obliged to you, and now I must really think of saying good-night. It is half-past nine. Really, Mrs. Manton, your tea has been so excellent, and I have passed such an agreeable evening, that I had quite forgotten the French Ambassador. I shall barely have time to get home to dress. *Good-night*, Mrs. Manton, and thanks for your very pleasant evening."

Before he could quit the room, a ring was heard at the door-bell.

"Good gracious! who can that be?" exclaims the hostess.

Maria Jane, that long-suffering domestic, had opened the door, and a faint scream was heard, as though that young woman had experienced that affection known among her kind as "a start."

"Lor, mum," cries she, regardless of ceremony in her surprised eagerness, "it's Miss Carry!"

Miss Carry it was beyond a doubt. Miss Carry in elegant attire, Miss Carry exquisitely gloved, and delicately booted, but Miss Carry with agitated mien and closely-drawn veil.

The assembled party could not have been more astonished if a thunderbolt had fallen in the midst. Mrs. Manton clasped her daughter to her broad bosom, in wonder-stricken affection. Bland suffered from his constitutional sympathy with persons in distress, the fair Jittlebury made preparations for fainting on the shortest notice, Joolier screamed, and poor Binns felt his heart knock at his ribs as he sank speechlessly into the nearest chair. Dacre was the only one present who preserved his equanimity.

"A flutter in the dove-cote, evidently! By Jove, how lovely she looks!"

"What is it, my precious, then?" asks the Manton. "Hush! don't give way, dear—see all the people."

But Carry was evidently overcome with grief, for she could do nothing but sob violently. "Take me away, mother," she whispered.

Dacre came to the rescue.

"You are tired, Mrs. Chatteris, I see. Mrs. Manton, you had better let your daughter lie down for a little. Her nerves have been shaken by something or other. Don't speak, my dear madam, I beg. Good-night."

As the door closed upon the mother and daughter, escorted by the sympathising Jittlebury, the genteel Perkin, and the agitated Joolier, he resumed, in his airiest tones,

"Come, Bland, we had better go. Some little family quarrel, I suppose. My young friend Chatteris *is* so hot tempered. *Amantium ira*, you know,—*amoris integratio*. What a lovely night for walking! You're sure about that address, Mr. Binns? Good-night, then," and he was gone.

But not to the French Ambassador's. He turned down the street towards the north-west part of town, and then suddenly stopped.

"If he had been at home," said he, "he would have stopped her coming. Now, if Master Cyril is from home at nine in the evening he would not be home before the small hours. I'll go to the *Pegasus*; he's sure to be there."

Bland and Binns wondered much on their homeward way.

"He's been ill-treatin' her, the scoundrel; I know he has!" cries the ferocious Binns. "D—n him, if I thought he had, I'd murder him!"

"My dear fellow!" expostulates the gentle Bland.

"Oh! it's all right, of course. But—well, never mind, I'm a miserable beggar, I know, but I wouldn't strike a woman. It's the act of a mean, dastardly coward! And yet this man is honoured and respected," continued the orator, addressing the street lamps. "He has friends, and wealth, and home. Curses on the miserable social system that binds men as slaves to the wheels of the revolving car of Juggernaut!"

Bland laughed, but very gently.

"My dear boy, you talk nonsense, and assume what may be untrue. The car of Juggernaut doesn't revolve, and you have no proof that Mr. Chatteris has been ill-treating his wife."

Binns growled, but made no reply.

CHAPTER XVII.

BOB THINKS OF RETURNING TO AUSTRALIA.

THE days lagged drearily at Matcham. A gloom seemed to have fallen on the old house. The winter sun looked coldly down upon the shivering trees in the park, and the winter wind wailed round about the quaint gables, and whirled the withered leaves hither and thither at will.

Saville Chatteris still preserved a decent outward show of dignity, but his heart was sore within him. It is not a pleasant thing for an old man who has worshipped Mammon and Society all his life long, to find that his days wax barren and joyless, and that grim death draws nearer day by day. Yet the old man was gradually confessing to himself that his life had been a mistake. He had heaped up for himself no riches of affection or honour, and the moth and rust of *ennui* and satiety were corrupting the sordid treasures of worldly respect that he had toiled for so long and so earnestly. The death of his firstborn weighed heavy on him. The good name of the Chatteris family had been the idol of his life; and his second son had, in his father's eyes, disgraced that good name for ever.

Cyril Chatteris, whatever he might be to the world, was to his father a dishonest and dishonoured man. The skeleton had been hidden, it is true—had been wrapped up and put away in a doubly-locked closet, and its ghastly bones covered with the sweet-smelling herbs of repentance and promise of amendment. But it was there nevertheless.

The accounts of his son's doings had not been cheering. That good fellow, Dacre, who had been entrusted by Mr. Saville Chatteris with the task of steering Cyril's bark through the shoals and quicksands of youth, wrote diligently of his *protégé's* progress; but the letters were not satisfactory. They did not report any new crime, or any glaring dereliction from social virtue, but they were utterly barren of all positive good news. Cyril had not done any of the things he ought not to have done, but it seemed, from Mr. Dacre's elegantly worded epistles, that he had left undone many of those things that he ought to have done.

"Cyril seems to have become a determined misanthrope," wrote the kind secretary. "He is seldom seen in good houses now, and though I am bound to say, my dear sir, that I have never by any chance heard of him save as a perfectly gentlemanly, and even rising and clever, young man, still you, sir, who know the world so well, cannot but feel somewhat annoyed at your son voluntarily absenting himself from that society which his father's position, and his own abilities, so well qualify him to ornament. I have frequently urged upon him the necessity for establishing his position; but he rejects my advice, and seems, I regret to say, to lean toward that Bohemian world which destroys so many young men of promise, and which, though necessary, no doubt, is scarcely the sphere in which your son should move."

This letter, written by Mr. Dacre the morning after an "opera supper," at which he had been the presiding genius, was but an echo of many that were read and deplored over in silence by the late *chargé d'affaires* at Krummelhoff. The sun of the Chatteris family threatened to set in Bohemian midnight, and the heart of its Head was heavy at the prospect.

"If Fred had only lived, this would not happen," said the old man to himself.

Fred had been all that he could desire—handsome, honourable, *debonnaire*, and an ornament to society; moreover, the old man fancied that the dashing dragoon might have "ranged himself" after a year or so, and made Kate the partner in such ranging. Now Fred was gone, Cyril was disgraced, and Kate was losing her good looks.

Poor Kate! First love is a very pleasant thing for poets to write about, but it is not so utterly without alloy as they would have us imagine. The jealousies, the heart burnings, the fevers of expectation, the sickness of hope deferred, the pleasures and the pains which go to make up that bitter-sweet that men call love, are pleasant to look back on; but I question much if, at the time, we are so violently happy as the poets would have us. Perhaps we remember only the sweet, and forget the bitter. It may be so; but hopeless love is the only real love after all. Alas! we burn, we groan, we toss, and cry

aloud; we sonnetise, and make our lives burdens to us for the love of one fair face. Fortune is kind, perchance; the soft eyes smile upon us alone, the sweet lips murmur love words for our ears only; and, lo! we find the fruit but ashes in the mouth; the violet eyes are but common grey after all; the exquisite love song but childish prattle; and we go down to our deaths with the ghost of another memory haunting us. We cannot animate the dry bones, our dead loves will not live for us again; perhaps it is better that they should not.

Kate was in love. It is a remarkable fact, and one which explains much human misery, that women have a predilection for forming passionate attachments to men who are in every way unworthy of them. In some few instances their love is so violent that it blinds their eyes for longer than the usual period of married kittenhood; in most cases, however, they speedily find that their idols are but common clay, and their "relief must be to loathe them." A marriage such as this must be a house of bondage indeed; but the women slaves work well, and the social Pharaoh hardens his heart, and "will not let the people go." What a curious farce it is that we are playing, and how glad some of us will be when the curtain falls, and we can wash the paint from our faces and go Home!

Kate thought she was in love with her cousin. He was in disgrace, she guessed; in trouble of some kind, she knew; he had told her that he loved her, and he was unhappy—all excellent reasons for giving her heart away. Moreover, the beloved object was far away, and this circumstance invested him with numerous qualities that were not his own, but belonged properly to Lancelot, and Steerforth, and d'Artagnan, and Mr. Carlyle, and other heroes of these modern days. So Kate loved in silence, and set up a graven image for herself, and worshipped it duly; all unwitting that another young man was rapidly fashioning her own likeness into that of a goddess, and was, in his turn, bowing down before it.

This young idolator was Mr. Bob Calverly. That young Australian had commenced to economise, but had not got on with the task as well as he had expected. He had fulfilled his threat of "cutting the concern," and had

presented himself at the Hall in the character of a sportsman. There was plenty of fun at sturdy old Sir Val's place in the winter season. The usual complement of London dandies, eager for the slaughter of game and the hunting of foxes; the usual complement of pretty girls, who dressed in the latest fashion of the Rue Bréda, and talked like a decoction of Shaftesbury and water; the usual mixture of matchmaking mothers, husband-hunting daughters, "jolly fellows," and "funny fellows," and "clever fellows," and "fellows who had written books, you know," and "fellows who travelled, and all that sort of thing;" in fact, "fellows" of all kinds and species but one. As Ponsonby often declared, "I like going to Yoicks' place, because you never meet any 'stuck-up fellows' there, you know," which was true. The Hall was a place for jollity and revelling, always within the limits of becoming mirth.

Into this genial atmosphere had the young Australian dropped, but he was not so well disposed to enjoy it as heretofore. In the first place, he was in debt; not to any great extent certainly, but enough to make him anxious concerning mails, and economical in personal expenditure. He had paid off his IOU's by the assistance of Dacre and his friend Mr. Charles Ryle, but he did not quite see how Mr. Charles Ryle himself was to be paid. The expected remittances had not arrived, and Messrs. Pack and Fleece were inexorable. So Bob went down to the Hall, and hunted three times a week, and made all sorts of good resolutions touching economy, and gambling, and borrowing money. Moreover, for the first time in his life, he was in love. From the moment when Kate, queenly and benignant, had swept in from the terrace at Matcham, Mr. Robert Calverly was in love. He confessed to himself that his love was hopeless, that such a goddess as Chatteris' cousin would never look upon a rough, uncouth fellow, like himself—a fellow who was unused to drawing-rooms, and who always "turned over" music four bars too soon. He remembered how silent he used to sit on those occasions when he was a guest at Matcham, and how Lady Loughborough snubbed him, and how the courteous host, after vainly attempting to discuss the

Schleswig-Holstein question, would say, with a weary smile, "Any more wine?" No. "Then we will join the ladies." He remembered how Dacre, that all-accomplished Dacre, had hinted that Miss Ffrench was *éprise* with her cousin Cyril, and how clever Cyril was, and how he could talk, and sing, and understood books, and music, and pictures, and a thousand things of which he, Bob, was ignorant. Remembering these things, he tormented himself, and burned to do some deed of might, which would perforce bring the eyes of his ladye love to regard him with interest.

Kate was very fond of Bob Calverly. I use the word fond in its most innocent meaning. She liked the young fellow, who was so bright and cheerful, and never languid or peevish like some of those "finer spirits" she had met with. She liked his honest admiration, his eagerness to oblige, and his blundering good-humoured ways. She was a quick-witted girl, and saw at a glance that beneath the unpolished surface of poor Bob lay a heart of gold. But she did not love him—oh! dear, no! Her heart never beat quicker at his approach, her face never flushed scarlet at his sudden presence, she was never coquettish with him, she never sent him on absurd errands, she was never ill at ease when he was stumbling through his small talk, but nodded and smiled, and took him by the hand and helped him out of the conversational mire with good-natured indifference. She was not in love—with anyone but Cyril.

Bob, however, had come to a great determination—he was going to ask Kate to marry him. This idea which, some three months back, would have seemed to him so ridiculous, appeared now, by mere force of importunity, the most natural thing in the world. He had ridden over to Matcham twice since he had returned, his father's intimacy with Saville Chatteris gaining him admittance to that house of mourning. He had been received by Kate on each occasion, and each visit had fed the fire which consumed him. Cyril was out of the way; his name was never mentioned between them, and Bob thought that Miss Ffrench had forgotten the cynical, effeminate young man who never wrote or gave sign of his existence.

Cheating himself into this belief, he arose one morn-

ing with a fixed idea. He would go over to Matcham that very morning and—well he would not exactly promise himself that he would ask her then and there, but if he saw an opportunity he would take it. He was shilly-shallying on the brink, you see, but a very little would turn the scale in favour of jumping in.

It was a hunting breakfast at the Hall, and when Bob appeared in ordinary costume, loud cries arose.

"Not coming, Bob!" cries Ponsonby, who had performed that hazardous but well-intentioned feat known as "tooling a fellow over in his drag" the night before—"why, what's the matter?"

"The loveliest hunting morning this season!"

"Oh, Mr. Calverly, and you promised to look after poor little me. What *shall* I do?" and Mrs. Barbara Blackthorn, a timid creature of twelve stone four, languished at him from beneath the most cunning of "bell-toppers."

"'Pon my soul, Calverly, it's too bad," says Colonel Brentwood, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone. "We all looked to you to show us the way."

"Why, Bob, my boy," roars the jovial squire, "miss the best day of the season! We draw Pakenham Wood to-day!"

Even this powerful attraction seemed powerless for Bob, for, muttering something about "business at Kirkminster," he proceeded to breakfast gloomily.

"Our young friend has lost his heart," whispered the gallant major to his neighbour, Mrs. Eversley, "the prettiest widow in the shire," as her military admirers termed her.

"Indeed! Who is the fortunate maiden? I like Mr. Calverly. He is not like you battered men of the world."

"I am innocent as a child, my dear madam," said the major with his mouth full of pie.

"You're a dreadful man, and I hate you," returned the lady sweetly. "Answer my question at once."

"I believe that old Chatteris's niece is the young lady."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Mrs. Eversley, tossing her head—Kate had "cut down" the fair widow gallantly on two or three occasions. "You don't say so! What fools men are, to be sure! It can't be for her looks, and I *know* that she hasn't a penny. Ham? Well, just the minutest atom."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if Master Bob's 'business' should take him to Matcham," returned the major, deftly shaving at that luxury.

"*You* would never be surprised at anything, I know. Oh, you men—you men, you have no soul."

With which remark the lively widow addressed herself to the ham, and spoke no more.

The major was right. No sooner had the usual bustle attendant upon mounting commenced, than Bob stole away, and was soon cantering down the country road to Matcham. As he felt the spring stride of his horse under him, his spirits rose, and the prospect didn't seem so desolate as it had done when he plunged savagely into his icy tub two hours before.

Old Sam, Bob's "own groom" and sworn henchman, watched his master's retreating figure with interest.

"I wonder whear he be agoin' tew now at that pëace," was his muttered reflection. "Master Bob dew 'ack wi' an uncommon loose rein, he dew sure*lie*."

But when Bob saw the leafless woods of Matcham top the hill, he drew bridle, and even went some two miles out of his way to gain time. At last he reached the well-known gates, and in another ten minutes his horse's hoofs crunched the crisp gravel under the house windows.

"Master was in the library," the servant said; "but would Mr. Calverly walk into the drawing-room?"

Once there, Bob's courage fell again. He tried to take interest in two heads by Greuze, and a Birket Foster, but failed utterly; and when Miss Kate appeared, he found nothing better to say in the first five minutes than a remark touching the weather, which was cold, he said, and his visit, which was early.

Kate assented to both propositions, and wondered what made the young man come over at ten o'clock in the morning.

"I thought you would have been at the meet, Mr. Calverly," she said.

"Well, yes, I thought of—but, you see—in fact, I didn't go to-day."

There was a spice of mischief in Kate, and, utterly unsuspecting the real reason of his visit, she said:

"It is strange that you should absent yourself. What will Mrs. Eversley say?"

"Mrs. Eversley! I'm sure I don't know."

"What! You haven't quarrelled, have you? I'm afraid you are a flirt, Mr. Calverly."

This accusation took Bob so fairly aback that he lost his mental balance.

"*You*, of all people, should not think that, Ka—Miss Ffrench."

Kate blushed, but she *would* not see the drift of the answer.

"Well, perhaps it is wrong of me to say so, Mr. Calverly, though Cyril is responsible for the report."

Cyril—always Cyril!

"You are always referring to Mr. Chatteris," said Bob, a little hotly.

Kate blushed deeper this time, but she was not driven to bay yet.

"Of course I am; we are like brother and sister, you know. How is he, Mr. Calverly? Have you heard? He never writes to us, and the only news I ever hear is from Mr. Dacre, who corresponds with Mr. Chatteris a great deal."

"I saw Mr. Dacre in London," says Bob, rushing at the opening. "He seems to have an easy life of it."

"Oh dear, no," says Kate, shaking her head wisely. "Mr. Dacre is very hard worked. I wish Cyril only worked half as much. I am afraid he is too fond of amusement."

Bob was at a *non-plus*. He couldn't discuss Cyril, so he tapped his boots with his whip, and asked how Lady Loughborough was.

"My aunt is suffering from one of her nervous headaches."

This was not getting any nearer to the subject.

"I haven't seen you out riding much lately, Miss Ffrench."

"No, I have not been out at all since poor Fred's accident."

Bob immediately cursed himself for being such a brute as to forget, and stammered something in apology. He then gazed vacantly into space, let his whip fall, and then picked it up with great deliberation.

"I wonder what makes him so stupid this morning," thought Kate.

She took out her watch, "You'll stop to lunch, Mr. Calverly?"

"No, thanks," cries Bob, starting up. "I must be back by mid-day. In fact, I just come over to—to—see you, and to, in fact—"

Kate had risen alarmedly. Her instinct told her that something was coming, but she made a brave effort to appear unconcerned.

"Well then, if you can't, good-bye."

Bob was in for it now. He seized the outstretched hand and held it tightly.

"I came over this morning to ask if you would marry me, Kate," said he, rapidly, with his eyes fixed on the floor.

"Mr. Calverly!"

Bob had found his tongue now.

"I have loved you ever since I saw you, and will never marry anyone but you. You will not refuse me, Kate? Believe me, I do love you. I know that I cannot make fine speeches and all that, but I love you sincerely, and will do all I can to make you happy. Oh! do not refuse me, my darling,—do not—I love you better than anything in this world, and will love you, please God, till I die."

There—he had said it at last. The words came out of his lips almost without an effort. It was not a "fine speech," but it was sincere enough.

Kate, with flaming face, tried to withdraw her hand, but Bob held it fast.

"Oh! Mr. Calverly, I never expected this. I am sorry. I did not know; believe me, I did not."

"Answer me, my darling," cries Bob, growing bold enough to kiss the trembling fingers he held.

Kate flashed out on him at once.

"Let go my hand, sir! I cannot marry you! I—I—Oh! please go, Mr. Calverly; and forget that you have ever spoken to me as you have done."

This was a cool request, and Bob thought so. He dropped the hand he held and walked to the door, with

mingled feelings of shame and jealousy, and a faint sense of the ludicrous, and thankfulness no one had seen him.

"Good-bye, Miss Ffrench," said he.

Kate bowed her head. Something in the accent of the simple words touched her, for as the door closed, she sank back on the ottoman and burst into tears.

* * * * *

Bob rode furiously down the park, and felt that if a fence twenty feet high was before him he could clear it. She loved Cyril! He felt sure of it, and she would never marry anyone else, and his life would be miserable, and he would go back to Australia at once, and, "by Jove, the hounds were running close to him!"

In his present condition of mind, he felt ready for anything. He pulled up, and listened. He could hear them distinctly. Greyfriar trembled in every limb, and pricked his ears furiously. "Steady, lad, steady! By Jove, here they are!" That old Bellow leading, and Huntsman, and Hautboy, and Cheerful, and Chanter, and Laggard, and Linkman! Away they go, three fields to the right. Crash over the hedge-row tumbles the excited Greyfriar, and Bob, cramming his hat on to his head, fixes his eyes on the leading hounds, and goes off at score. The hounds were close to their fox, but the field were far from being close to the hounds.

The first object that met Bob's eager gaze was a horse's hoof gesticulating wildly from behind a hedgerow immediately in front of him. There was no time for words, and almost before he could wink Greyfriar took the bit in his teeth and bounded over an ugly hedge and ditch, landing on the skirts of a red coat, and dangerously near to the prostrate form of the major's struggling "second horse."

"Line, sir, line!" cries the major, indignantly; and then recognising the familiar grey flanks of Bob's favourite hack, wonders "where the dooce he can have sprung from?"

Whoo-ooop! There he goes! The dragged brush sneaks under a rail but two fences ahead of the hounds, and as Bob looks back and sees nothing but his uncle's flea-bitten roan, and the fluttering skirts of Mrs. Eversley's

habit going "in and out" of a "double" on the extreme left, he picks up the curb a little tighter and feels that he is in for a good thing.

The major having recovered his saddle, is "bucketting" Sabretasche by Candied Peel out of Mountain Maid furiously, and the astute first-whip, who has been riding as if he had a large assortment of spare necks in the wide pocket of his weatherbeaten "bit-o'-pink," comes alongside from between a stiff fence and a low bough in that crumpled-up condition necessary for the preservation of his head under such circumstances.

"Maarnin', sir! Maarnin'!" cries he, in answer to Bob's wildly flourished hat, and in another ten seconds the game little fox is held high in air in the centre of the baying and leaping pack.

The major appearing with a broken stirrup-leather and a muddy coat, is greeted by the delighted Bob, and before the rest of the field can arrive by highway and byway, the rejected lover is presenting a very dirty brush to Mrs. Eversley, who has reined up, cool and radiant, by the side of Sir Val's snorting and exhausted roan.

"The best run of this year," cries the master, delightedly rubbing his horse's nose. Mrs. Eversley, you went like a bird—never saw such riding in my life!"

"Ah, Ponsonby, this is pretty well for the 'Clays.' An hour and five minutes, and as straight as a railroad! Bob, my boy, where did you spring from? Sly dog, creeping through gates."

Bob disclaimed all such proceedings warmly, and remarked that he was just coming home when he heard the hounds running, and happened to be in time for the finish.

The fair widow shook her dainty finger at him roguishly.

"I know where you have been, you naughty boy. Poor Mrs. Blackthorn was left to the tender guidance of Colonel Brentwood, who was thrown out at the brook in consequence. You shameful young Lothario!"

Poor Brentwood. That hard-riding gentleman was indeed bemoaning his hard fate as he cantered savagely down a dirty lane in company with Mrs. Barbara.

If Brentwood hated one thing more than another, it

was the task of "leading" a lady through "a quick thing," and when that lady was twelve stone, under-mounted, not pretty, and married to a stupid husband, of whom she always talked, he may be forgiven if he was somewhat wroth at the issue of his day's sport.

"What the dooce does the woman want to hunt for?" he murmured, as his fidgety thoroughbred plunged and curvetted under the influence of a succession of handrails, which *always* caught the too redundant habit of Blackthorn's better-half. "Why can't she stop at home and look after that lout of a husband? Thank goodness, here are the squire and the rest, and I can get a 'weed' with Jack."

But when the happy few that had been "in it" were reached, the widow, who found Bob very dull and disconsolate, attacked the *beau sabreur* at once; and, notwithstanding that she gave him permission to smoke, irritated him beyond measure by a spirited account of the "splendid run," and crocodile consolations touching his hard fate at being thrown out "so *very* early."

Bob rode on alone; his heart was heavy. He was in no humour for chit-chat and flirtation. Kate had refused him, and his life was barren. He wanted to be alone and think it over. Should he go back to Australia? He had not answered the question satisfactorily when he had given Greyfriar over to Isaac, with instructions concerning a bran mash and bandages, nor even when he reached his room, and almost mechanically opened a note which lay on the table.

"Crutched Friars, 15th December.

"SIR,—We beg to inform you that your note-of-hand for £1500, payable at Messrs. Coutts and Co., has been returned to us dishonoured, and we have to request that you will take up the same without delay.

"We are, sir, your obedient servants,

"GULCH AND SWINDELMANN.

"Mr. Robert Calverly,

"The Hall, Loamshire."

"Confound it!" cried Bob, "it's Ryle's bill. I had forgotten all about the date. Hang it, this'll never do."

There was yet another letter, which, short as it was, relieved Bob's feelings much.

"DEAR BOB,—Got a letter from C. R., complaining about that confounded acceptance. He says it's out of his hands, and that, if you don't pay, the holders will prosecute. If you haven't got the money, you had better look me up, and we'll see what can be done.

"In haste, yours,

"RUPERT DACRE."

"What a good fellow he is!" said Bob. "I'll go up to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVIII.

LIMING THE TWIG.

DACRE was right; Cyril Chatteris had not gone home. He was in the billiard room of the "Pegasus;" and when Dacre entered that classic shade, he found him losing rapidly to Randon, who, with his customary delusion strong upon him, was informing the half dozen men present that he was "G-g-reat at b-b-billiards; he owned it, fuf-wankly owned it."

"I say, Dacre, have you heard about the Cardinal?" cries Miniver. "They say that Ryle's got him."

"Don't believe it."

"Heard so this afternoon. They say that Lundyfoot is smashed; lost a pot, you know."

"Ah! And so Ryle's got his horse, has he? Well, he's a great clumsy brute."

"Magnificent shoulders!" says old Martingale, a great "make and shape" man. "If they run him straight he might do something."

"Lay you fifty to four!" cries Miniver, instantly.

"Well, thank you, no. I don't bet."

Miniver muttered something about "backing opinions," and "surly old boys."

"Barnestaple, I'll gi-give you a g-game!"

"Let us plunge into the quiet pool," says Barnestaple.

"All r-right. I own I'm rather g-good at p-p-pool.

Halfcrown lives. I own, I fuf-wankly own, I f-feel in f-f-form to-night."

"Cyril," says Dacre, "I want to speak to you."

Cyril was very sulky, and looked so.

"What do you want to speak to me about?"

"Come out of this place, and I'll tell you. Whom do you think I saw to-night?"

Cyril flushed. He guessed pretty closely. "How should I know?"

"Your wife."

"My—what?"

"Why, the young lady who is at present Mrs. Chatteris."

"Where did you see her?"

"At her mother's."

At her mother's? How did Dacre know her mother? and what did he do there? Cyril's heart beat quickly.

"I don't understand you," said he.

"The simplest thing in the world. I went down to Dym Street to take tea with an old friend of mine, and met your charming little friend."

I have said that the unhappy hero of this story was not a brave man, but he never felt nearer courage than now. His first impulse was to seize his smiling enemy by the throat.

"Listen to me, Cyril. I want to know who and what this woman is? I have taken the trouble to make myself acquainted with her family. It is not remarkable for blood or breeding."

Cyril winced. "What business have you to interfere in my affairs?"

"My dear fellow, I am *in loco parentis*. I am your 'guide, philosopher, and friend,' you know."

"That will do. I hate that sort of nonsense. I want to know what you mean."

"Well, I *mean* to write and tell your father all about this little affair."

"Tell him, then, if you like," says Cyril, driven to bay.

"The woman is nothing to me."

"Now don't repudiate the mystic tie. She says that she is your wife."

"She lies then! She is nothing of the kind."

Dacre looked admiringly at the young man, and then said, patronisingly.

"Indeed! Ah! I did not give you credit for so much firmness of purpose. My dear Cyril, you need not trouble yourself to tell lies to me, because I know all about it. You married the girl just after you came back from Matcham."

It was bold play, but it lost him the game.

Cyril breathed freely. He did not really know, then; he only surmised.

"My dear Dacre, what stuff you talk. Do you want to make a penny novel out of this miserable affair? I have got into a scrape with the girl, I admit, but you don't think that I would be such a fool as to marry her, do you?"

Dacre was beaten. With all his astuteness, he had not read the "cub's" character rightly. "Well, perhaps I am wrong, old fellow, but I really was afraid that you had been committing some folly of the kind. Young men you know, often do foolish things. Well, she is a pretty little thing enough; but you must really, 'forswear sack' now, you know. What would papa say?"

Cyril's fingers itched to grasp the collar of his tormentor. That any man should dare to speak thus to him! He quivered with rage at the insult. He had admitted to himself long ago that he did not love his wife, but he felt the shame of his position keenly enough. It must be borne, however.

"I can't give her up," said he, at length. "So it's no use talking."

"Why not?"

"Well, I can't—that is enough."

"Won't the lady go?"

Cyril blushed. He had an ambition to be considered a *roué*, and who had ever heard of a *roué* who could not get rid of his Burden when he wished it?

"I don't want her to go yet," said he, and laughed.

"I wish you would let me see this Pearl of Price. I will pay you a call some day. Now good-night, I am glad, my dear boy, that you have not made a fool of yourself."

Not made a fool of himself! That was just exactly what he had done. To marry the girl was bad enough, but to find out that he did not love her was worse.

The fact was that she wearied him. She was too loving, too easily moulded, too slavish to please. In the first days of their acquaintance, when she loved him less, she pleased him more. Now, a word was law to her, and he was tired of being always obeyed. His warped and selfish nature could not appreciate the beauty of a woman's love. Had his wife been passionate, jealous, coquettish, he would have worshipped her; but this conquest was too easy to tickle his vanity. If a woman crawled to his feet, he would accept her homage with calm gratification, but he would not love her. Did he fancy that he loved a woman, and find that she laughed at him, he would rave about her, and sigh for her. The curse of satiety had overtaken him early, and only forbidden fruit could please.

He had quarrelled with Carry that day. She had besought him to make their marriage public, or at least to take her away from London. He refused, of course, and she had cried and implored and sobbed, until some of the ludicrous affected him, and he laughed at her. She said nothing, but dried her eyes at once. Strangely enough, that little action awakened in him some germ of the old tenderness, he tried to caress her, but she withdrew from his arms. This gave him a new sensation. The slave rebelled. He would exercise his pleasurable power, and make her kneel again. But she would not kneel. He was annoyed and angry, and his vanity was wounded. He would give her a lesson. So he went down to the Pegasus.

When she heard the door shut she cried, and then waited for him to return, in order that she might fall on his heart and be forgiven. But he did not return, and her ardour began to cool. He was cold to her, and he did not love her, and she had given up everything for him, and this was not fair; it was not to be borne. The minutes flew, and the house was lonely, and the piano out of tune, and the music old. There was a party next door, and she could hear the soft strains of dance music.

Other girls were happy, and she was left alone in shame and misery. Why did she leave her mother? She would go back again, and then Cyril would be sorry and come and fetch her. She wrote a little note and tore it up. He would know where to find her.

When Cyril came home and found his house left unto him desolate, he was furious. He said to himself that he did not care, and that his wife would come back again; but still he was startled into something very like jealousy. Did Carry dare to love anything or anybody better than himself! He had wearied, he thought, of her soft curved lips, and languid eyes, and curling tresses; he was tired of tender sighs and warm kisses and murmured love-words; but the thought that another man might possess all this was gall and wormwood. Yet he would not go and seek her. He would not be tamed by a trick like that. Cyril thought he understood women, and imagined that it was a bad plan to submit. If he had judged them by a real instead of an imaginary standard, he would have seen that to submit is often to conquer.

"She will come back again in the morning," he said.

But he was wrong.

When the guests had departed from the Mantonian roof, Carry had a long "talk" with her mother.

"He doesn't love me, mother dear. I know he doesn't, and I don't like living as I do. It is not right."

The widow was at first inclined to endorse the proposition, but visions of paternal fury, and commensurate cuttings off of imaginary estates rose before her.

She did not rate Master Cyril's diplomatic talents high enough. "He loves my gal, I know he does, and it's only a bit of a tiff, I suspect," was her inward comment. So she soothed her daughter, and told her that Cyril was like all other men, and "wanted a little outing now and then, you know."

"But he will leave me alone all day, mother, and then never speak to me scarcely."

"Business is business, my dear," was the widow's sage reply; "and you mustn't expect your husband to be allus danglin' at your heels. Lor, I wouldn't take any notice of his tempers, not if it was ever so!"

By which ambiguous giving out she endeavoured to cheer the drooping spirits of the Fairy Prince's bride.

"As to the marriage, my dear, *that's* all right. Don't you fret about that."

So Carry was fain to drop off to sleep, sobbingly, with an inward conviction that she was right, and that her mother did not take the proper view of the case. But when in the sanctuary of her own chamber, Mrs. Manton's thoughts assumed a different aspect.

"It can't be that he's a-tryin' to play the gal false! You'd better take care, Mister Chatteris, for all your leftenants and Matcham Parks. My gal's an honest woman's daughter, and she shan't lose her good name through any trickery of yours, I can tell you. I'll jist inquire about you, Mr. Cyril Chatteris. I'll jist ask Mr. Dacre about you. He's a gentleman, *he* is, and he won't see a poor gal wronged, *I* know."

So the birds were flying into Rupert Dacre's snare quite charmingly.

That gentleman himself was not aware of this, and was beset with doubts and fears. He did not know whether he should believe Cyril or not. The boy spoke so readily and lied so calmly, that even the astute Rupert was deceived. "He can't have married her; and if he has, why then, it's all plain sailing," was his muttered commentary as he laid his head on the pillow.

Next morning, however, he found a letter at the Office, requesting him to go to Dym Street, and signed in a scratchy handwriting, "Anastasia Manton."

"So I'm to be mediator in the quarrel, eh? Well, I shall find out the rights of the case at all events."

Carry was feverish with excitement, and looked bewitching.

"My daughter, Mrs. Chatteris," says the Manton.

Rupert bowed low, and Carry blushed. She had seen the aristocratic Rupert before.

After a little chat about the weather, and the town, and Shakespeare, and the musical-glasses, the widow intimated that she desired a private audience, and Carry withdrew.

"Excuse me, my dear madam, but I cannot help congratulating my friend Chatteris upon his choice. I

never saw a more lovely creature than your daughter."

This was, perhaps, a little too strong for the French Ambassador's, but it suited Mrs. Manton's more vulgar palate. She bridled with delight, and forthwith recounted the whole story of the marriage.

Dacre was almost surprised. He had not expected so much deceit in so young a man. He kept his outward composure, however, and assured the widow that such matches were far from uncommon, and that rich parents, as a rule, were hard-hearted and prone to violence.

Mrs. M., whose knowledge of fashionable life had been gained at the Surrey Theatre, smiled assent, but requested Mr. Dacre's advice.

Mr. Dacre pursed up his lips, and, endeavouring to blend Lord Chesterfield with Dr. Watts, began.

"Ah, my dear madam, you task my poor powers somewhat severely. I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Chatteris' family intimately, and his father is proud—very proud. Should he suddenly hear of his son's marriage, he would probably do some injustice, of which he would afterwards repent. There can be no doubt that your daughter would grace any sphere, but you see that old people have antipathies and prejudices, and Lady Loughborough especially is quite of the *vieille roche*."

This was the first time that the widow had heard of Lady Loughborough, but she nodded as though Debrett was at her fingers' ends.

"Now, my advice is, that you proceed exactly as you have done. To let my friend Cyril think that you distrust him would be to beget a certain estrangement; while to encourage the natural but foolish suspicions of your charming daughter would be cruel. If you will allow me, my dear madam, to undertake the office of mediator, so to speak, between these young people, I think that I can set matters right. I think that the best thing I can do will be to take Mrs. Chatteris home this very afternoon. Young men are often proud, and serious family quarrels have arisen in consequence of a foolish display of pride. I will gradually break the news to Mr. Saville, and hope that my influence with his son will produce some good effect. You may rely on me to give you every intelli-

gence of your daughter, and I beg that you will always consider me as your friend."

The widow was fairly swamped. She consented, of course, with pride and pleasure; and Carry was instructed to put on her bonnet and go back with Mr. Dacre.

The poor child half demurred; but the gentleman had been so polite and kind, that she almost forgot her former dislike, and was argued into submission.

The pair started, Dacre remarking that, as the "day was so charming, we can walk, if Mrs. Chatteris does not mind."

So they walked; and as Dacre looked down upon the trim figure of Cyril's wife, he began to envy him his good fortune.

"My friend Chatteris is a happy man," said he.

Carry blushed.

"I fear, however, that he does not appreciate the treasure he has gained."

This was going too far. Carry would not hear her Idol scoffed at.

"Sir!"—with a look as much like an insulted Princess as she could achieve.

"Oh, my dear child" (another start), "your good mother has told me all about your domestic circle. I know that Master Cyril has not been as kind as he should have been."

"You have no right to say so," said Carry.

"Pooh!—don't get angry with me, my dear child. I am old enough to be your father."

Carry laughed, despite her anger. His assumption of vast age was amusing.

"You don't look so," said she.

"Perhaps not. But my experience,—ah well—" and Dacre finished with a sigh that might have been heaved by the Corsair himself.

Carry looked up at him with a little awe. Here was one of the Penny Journal heroes at last. Here was a man with but "one virtue and a thousand crimes,"—a haughty, handsome, devil-may-care aristocrat. Would the wolf eat her? The suspense was rather pleasant.

The wolf spoke again, but in very soft tones.

"My dear Mrs. Chatteris, you must forgive me if I appear rude, because I am entrusted with a very delicate mission."

"Indeed?"

"I have undertaken to make Cyril's peace with his father."

"Oh, Mr. Dacre!"

"Of course, Cyril does not know of this, and you must not tell him. You promise?"

Carry had all that delicious delusion about community of thoughts, and absence of concealment, which belongs to newly-wedded wives, and she said,

"I hardly know. I ought not to keep anything from my husband."

She expected him to argue or to plead; but he was too deeply read in womankind to be taken in by so shallow an artifice.

"You are quite right," he said; "quite right. A wife should have no secrets from her husband. So we will drop the subject."

This was hardly fair. Carry pouted and blushed, and looked askance.

"You silly little woman, you are dying to know all about it."

The language might be too free, but the accent was tenderly protective, and she could not take offence.

"Oh, no, I am not."

"Promise, then, and I will tell you."

She laughed again.

"I promise."

"Ah! well, on second thoughts, I had better not tell you, because you are sure to let it out."

"Oh, dear no! When I say a thing I mean it."

"Delightful! I have found a woman who 'says a thing and means it.'"

"Mr. Dacre, you are very absurd."

"I am, I know; but you make me so."

"I?"

"Yes. Before I saw you—"

Ah! was the wolf going to bite? It was very wrong, Carry admitted, but she half hoped so.

"You what?"

"I did not believe in such a thing as a constant woman."

"And do you now?"

He looked down upon her with a curious glance.

"I don't know," said he, slowly.

She blushed, and was silent.

They had reached civilization now, and Dacre's hat was in the air each second.

"Lady Windermere! Ah! there's Jack Walton again. How do, Pakenham? That's Lord Croftonbury. No, the man with the white hat; and Leamington, and Fitz."

"You seem to know everybody."

"Everybody worth knowing," said Dacre, who had been improvising names for the last five minutes. "But you are getting tired. Let me put you into this cab. I will come up to-morrow and see you. Now, tell Cyril to be a good boy, and not to quarrel any more. Good-bye."

He made his exit in the nick of time. He did not want to be seen walking with so noticeable an unknown as Carry, and he had said quite as much as he dared. On the whole, he was well satisfied with his morning's work, and strolled down to his club with a light heart and a good appetite.

As for Carry, she was quite astonished when the cab stopped at the well-known stuccoed villa, and started when she realised the fact that her thoughts had not been of her husband but of her husband's friend.

CHAPTER XIX.

WIFE-TAMING.

CYRIL was lying on the sofa in the little drawing-room, with an open book in his hand, and a cigar between his lips.

"Oh! So you've come back."

"Yes, dear, I have come back; and I am sorry that—"

"Of course. Be kind enough to be quiet now you have come back, because my head aches."

And he addressed himself to a palpable French novel with assumed gusto.

This was the line of treatment he had determined on. He would not let his wife see that he had been annoyed at her absence. He would assume the rôle of a calm man of the world, one whom nothing could offend or distress.

Carry was taken aback. Very little provocation would have made her rush into her husband's arms, and weep out her penitence, but her pride took fire now.

"I am going out for a walk," she said. "I only came in for a moment to see if you had come home."

"Where are you going?"

Carry laughed.

"You are inquisitive."

A thought crossed Cyril's mind, but he dismissed it instantly. He would temporise.

"And, pray, how is dear mamma?"

Carry grew hot, and angry, but she kept her passion down.

"'Dear mamma' is very well."

"Ah! I rejoice. Pull down that blind, my love; the sun hurts my eyes. Thank you. What a treasure a wife is, to be sure!"

"Cyril, you are very unkind to speak like that."

"Unkind! Not at all. One cannot always be billing and cooing, and even *your* charming little *minauderies* grow wearisome at times."

Carry's eyes filled with bitter tears. He was speaking harshly to her, and he was speaking French, which she did not understand.

"I am very sorry for going away," she said, after a pause.

"So you have remarked before. I regret that you are sorry, my dear love; but you might easily have avoided any annoyance to yourself by stopping at home."

"I was angry at something."

Cyril would have given much to know what she had been angry at, but he would not ask.

"You should learn to control your temper, my dear girl." Puff-puff. "Young women in civilised spheres of life do not behave like the heroines of French novels, without some valid reason."

"I don't know anything about French novels, but I had a valid reason."

"I beg your pardon," says this young Petruchio, ignoring the latter part of the sentence; "I should have said the 'London Journal' perhaps. I had forgotten that your literary tastes are not very refined."

Carry began to cry. The tormentor went on delightedly:—

"Suppose you give us a little exhibition now. Let us see Lady Bellarmine, or Lucy the Pirate's Daughter. You would do well upon the stage, my dear. Mrs. Cyril Chatteris, as the 'Deserted Wife,' would look well on the bills."

"Oh! Cyril, don't. I am not as clever as you are, I know; but you need not say such cruel things."

The pitiful action of her hands, raised as though to ward off some cruel blow, touched him, and he had half risen to kiss and forgive her; but he thought of Dacre, and his "man of the world" model, and refrained.

She went to him, and kissed him.

"Forgive me!"

"I have nothing to forgive. I am only sorry that you were so foolish. What made you go?"

"I don't know. I was unhappy. I thought that you had deceived me—and—"

She broke down in a passion of sobs.

Cyril was silent. A new idea had possessed him. Though he had denied his marriage to Dacre, he had never contemplated deceiving his wife. He had thought himself too closely bound to break his chains. Mrs. Manton was too wary, and his wife—ah! his wife, he might deceive her, keep her in ignorance, and perhaps—. A crowd of thoughts rushed upon him, and it was as though a trap door had opened in his heart, and a flood of light let in to its dark recesses. He loved Kate Ffrench, and he hated his wife.

She clung to his knees.

"Oh! Cyril, forgive me. I will always believe what you say. I will never go away again."

He looked down upon her raised face and streaming eyes. He had conquered again, and the suppliant was

kneeling at his feet. This constant triumph was wearisome.

"Poor little fool!" was his inward reflection, and then he raised and kissed her.

"There, be a good girl, and dry your eyes, and we will have tea like domestic persons."

She felt the contempt in the tone, and the expanded flower of wifely love and obedience shut up its petals. He did not care for her. He thought her beneath him in intellect and birth, and despised her. Well, others did not. She was pretty and ladylike, and quite as good as the well-dressed women she saw in the Park or the Gardens. Men admired her—gentlemen. Mr. Dacre did. Ah! Mr. Dacre, he would not have been so unkind.

She did not tell her thoughts to Cyril. In fact, the pair made up their quarrel, and were quite domestic all the evening—Cyril reading the "Princess" to his wife, while she buried herself in the cushions of the ottoman, and wished that he was always in such good humour.

CHAPTER XX.

SELLING AND BORROWING.

BOB CALVERLY fulfilled his threat of coming up to town. He was on thorns about the acceptance, concerning which Messrs. Gulch and Swindelmann had written, and thought that, unless he succeeded in "taking it up," or performing some commercial operation of like nature, he would be sued and imprisoned instantly. Rupert Dacre was his sheet anchor, and he inwardly vowed that, if he pulled him through the scrape, he would consider him a friend for life.

Dacre, who was waiting his arrival, received him with *empressement*.

"My dear Bob, I am so glad to see you. Those confounded fellows—"

"Gulch and Swindelmann!"

"Exactly. Threatened to prosecute, or some nonsense; and as my name is attached to the document, you see

I was uneasy. But, of course, you can put the thing right at once."

Bob's face fell.

"I am afraid that I can't, my dear fellow. I have not had any remittances, and I am just as hard up as possible."

"That's bad; but, however, I half expected as much. So I made it my business to go down to Hampton Court and see Ryle."

"My dear Dacre—"

"Don't thank me. I saw the ruffian, and told him what I believe to be the state of the case; and he was rather huffy at first, and said that you—that is we—had promised to pay, and that the bill was out of his hands, and that money was 'tight,' and so on. But he made me promise to bring you out if you came up, and that he would see if he could make a further advance."

"A further advance—can't we renew?"

"Impossible. Gulch and Swindelmann never do that. If we don't pay before the day after to-morrow, they will 'take steps' as they call it."

"Hang it!" cries Bob, rumpling his hair. "What's to be done?"

"Try and get some more coin from Charley, I suppose. You see, Bob, that I expected you to put the thing right, and made no provision myself. If you had only told me before, I might have scraped the money together somehow, but I can't do it now."

Bob was hit hard. He believed in friendship, and so on, and did not like to see such a good fellow as Dacre suffer on his account. So, after a moment's silence, he took up his hat and said:—

"Well, I suppose there's no help for it. Let us go and see Ryle."

Mr. Ryle was quite willing to see them; indeed, that wary money-lender had a little scheme of his own which he intended, if possible, to bring to a successful issue.

Mr. Charles Ryle was somewhat of a sporting turn. Like most men of his stamp, the Horse, as a money-making animal, possessed great attractions for him. He had owned several notable racehorses in his time, and

before he became "respectable" had done a very profitable business on the turf. It is true that the horses which he was reported to own, won but rarely; but perhaps their losing was more remunerative. When they did win, they won as big a thing as they could, and no one professed to be more astounded than Mr. Ryle himself. He became possessed of his horses in various ways. Sometimes he bought them at quiet race meetings; sometimes a trip to the Continent, or the Irish market, would result in an addition to the stables at Thames Ditton, which were ostensibly owned by a lean, wispy-looking man, by name Docketer, but which in reality belonged to Mr. Charles Ryle. Sometimes he bought a "crack" on commission, as a speculation, and sometimes his horses represented bad debts.

The Cardinal was one of these last.

Little Miniver was right in his surmise regarding that animal and Lord Lundyfoot. The Cardinal by Manxman, out of La Grande Duchesse by Perigord out of Pantinella, dam Lady Lisle by Saunterer, by Sultan out of Beeswing, had been the property of Lord Lundyfoot, and that nobleman had been imbued with what he termed "a notion of the horse." Notwithstanding the poor opinion entertained by the sporting world in general concerning the Cardinal, his owner had entered him for various races, and backed him heavily.

The result was in the highest degree unsatisfactory. Though admitted by "Peeping Tom," and "O.P.Q.," and "X.Y.Z.," and "Scrutator," and "Orange and Purple," and some other scores of anonymous sporting oracles, to be "a great sticker through dirt," the Cardinal had stuck effectually in the "ruck," and up to this time had never won a race. Poor Lundyfoot put on his money with a tenacity of purpose worthy of a better cause, but in vain. At last he succumbed to the pressure of fate and creditors, and, as his crony and companion, Dick Waffles, remarked—"threw up the sponge, sir; begad, and gave in!" Ryle possessed much "paper" with the Lundyfootian signature, and after a touching interview with his lordship, in a private room at Long's, consented to take the Cardinal as part payment of his debt.

"You've got a 'crack' at last, Charley, my boy," said his lordship, when the bargain was concluded; "I haven't been lucky with him myself, but if you mind your p's and q's, by the Lord Harry, sir, he'll make your fortune yet!"

Up to this time Ryle had not been satisfied with his bargain.

Mr. Docketer ostensibly purchased the much vaunted horse, took him down to Ditton, and in a fortnight expressed his opinion that "he were the biggest bullock he ever see!" When pressed for his reasons by Ryle, he shook his head, and said, "He may be a good useful 'oss through the clays, Muster Ryle, but as for racin' him, why I'd put ten stone on him, and *run* him tew mile."

Ryle felt dispirited. He had seen the horse run several times, and was always of opinion that he *ought* to have got what he went for; and had it not been for the well-known fact that Lundyfoot always "ran to win," would have suspected foul play. But Lundyfoot's stable, like Cæsar's wife, was above suspicion. A few private trials in which light weight nags, with boys on their backs, left the 'big horse' six lengths behind, only confirmed Mr. Docketer's judgment, and when that veteran himself failed to get more than a mile in two minutes out of him, the Cardinal was condemned as one of Mr. Ryle's failures. But he had taken the horse with all his engagements, and did not feel inclined to forfeit just at present.

"Something might be done by judicious puffery, and laying against him all we could get," said he to Docketer.

Docketer turned his straw end for end, and plunging his hands in his pockets, looked moodily at the pebbled-yard, and replied:—

"You may lay agen him till you're black in the face, and you won't get your money on then. He's a good feeder, and a sound 'oss, Muster Ryle, but the best thing you can do with him is to sink his peddygree, and henter him over the water."

"Won't do, Docketer!" returned Ryle. "That game don't pay now-a-days."

"Then make a hunter of him, he ain't quick enough for a steeplechase."

"Don't see it."

"Well, bust it, then!" exclaimed poor Docketer at length; "crack him up in the papers, and sell him to a swell."

"I must sell him to somebody, that's clear. But who'll buy him?"

"Buy him! Why, if I had your chances, Muster Ryle, I'd *make* 'em buy him, whether they liked him or not. You sell him, sir; get him puffed if you can, and I'll lay agen him if I pawn my Sunday vestkit."

Ryle laughed, "I see what I can do with him, Docketer," said he, "but I'm afraid he's a hard bargain."

So the "big herse" was kept at exercise, and Mr. Docketer went up and down the earth telling people "that he'd got a 'flyer' in his stable, on the quiet, you know, and was going to see what he could do with him."

But nobody bit. The fish did not rise well at the fly, and some weeks had passed, and the Cardinal was yet unsold.

When Dacre and Bob reached Hampton Court they were ushered into the presence of the august Ryle, who was pretending to be immersed in business.

"Ah! good morning, gentlemen; work follows me out here, you see. When a man has as many irons in the fire as I have, his life is not a bed of roses, by any means. Sit down, Mr. Calverly, and take a glass of sherry, after your drive. What has procured me the pleasure of your company on such a bleak day as this?"

Bob was a little astonished at this, and looked at Dacre. That gentleman, more used to the ways of the insidious Ryle, replied,

"Mr. Calverly was anxious about that little bill of his."

"Ah!" said Ryle, holding up a glass of the "old brown" between his finger and thumb. "Just so; I had forgotten. The fact is that I paid it away in the course of business, and looked upon it as done with. Help yourself, Mr. Dacre. Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Well, the fact is," said Bob, "that there is something wrong. I have not received any remittances, and I came to ask you if you could advance me a little more money."

"Dear me, Mr. Calverly, I am sorry to hear that, You see that I am not in the habit of lending money, and I merely made you a little temporary advance because you were a friend of Mr. Dacre's; but I really thought that you would repay me at the end of the month. I am afraid that I *must* refuse."

Bob felt his heart sink.

"But I can't take up the bill."

"I am sorry, very sorry. Who are the holders?"

"Gulch and Swindelmann."

"Very nasty firm to have dealings with, Mr. Calverly. I could have wished that it had been anybody else."

"Now come, Ryle, you *must* do this for us," says Dacre.

"Mr. Calverly is sure to be 'all right' in another month or so, and will settle matters satisfactorily."

Ryle looked across at Rupert under the cover of another glass of sherry. "How much do you want, Mr. Calverly?" said he, "I would be happy to do anything for you if I could. But—"

"Two thousand," says Dacre, before Bob could speak.

"Two thousand! My dear sir, do you think that I am made of money?"

"Fifteen hundred would do," says Bob.

"Come, Ryle, can't you arrange it? I have no doubt that Mr. Calverly is not particular to a twenty pound note but we must have enough to take up the bill, you know."

"Well," returned Ryle, after a pause, "I know a man who might lend you some money; but he is rather a peculiar fellow. In fact, he is a Turfite, and he will be sure to want to put off some horse or another upon you."

Bob laughed.

"I don't mind a horse much, but I must get out of this scrape, by hook or by crook."

Ryle meditated.

"Look here," said he, "I'll tell you what to do. We'll just drive down to his place. It is only five miles from this, and I'll introduce you to him."

Dacre looked askance. "What on earth is he going to do?" he thought. But Bob had jumped at the proposal.

Visions of an infuriated Gulch and an irate Swindelmann, backed up by actions-at-law and notices in the newspapers, rose before him.

"Come along then!" he cried. "It's getting late; we'd better go at once."

While the phaeton, resplendent with silver, and gorgeous with grooms, was being brought round, Dacre managed to speak to the money-lender. "What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Sell him the Cardinal," returned Mr. Ryle, curtly.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CARDINAL.

THE stables were reached, and Docketer came forth, Touching his hat to Dacre, he inquired what he could do for him.

"The fact is, my dear Mr. Docketer," said Ryle, "that this gentleman—Mr. Calverly—wants to have a look at the Cardinal."

Then, aside to Bob. "We must humour the fellow a little."

Mr. Docketer produced a key from his Bedford cords and said, "With pleasure."

The Cardinal was stripped and exhibited. He was a big bay horse, with immense power behind the saddle, deep chest, fine muscular thighs, and rather a coarse head. As he stood lazily lifting a leg, and munching contentedly at his corn, he looked a tower of strength.

"He's a fine big horse," said Bob.

"Yes, sir; and he's a fine fast 'oss too. That's the 'oss wot can stay till the day after to-morrow. I never knowed one of his lot cut up soft yet, and I've seen a good many 'osses in my time. There's a shoulder for yer! Them's the quarters, Muster Ryle, as you well know! *He's* one of the Marquis of Lundyfoot's breeding, he is; and a fair upstandin' picter of a 'oss he is."

"Lord Lundyfoot never did much good with him," says Bob, who knew something about "prices current" in the sporting world.

"Werry likely," returned Mr. Docketer, "werry likely. Cos why? Cos his lor'ship was allus eaten up with trainers and such like—cos his lor'ship didn't know what was a going on in his own stable—cos the 'oss was *pulled*; ay, *pulled*, Muster Dacre! Why, blarm me!" cries Mr. Docketer in a sudden burst of fervour. "If he was jist two yeer younger, I'd henter him for the Darby!"

"Two years make all the difference," says Bob, laughing.

"You're right, sir; you're right! But when a 'oss has make and shape like that, and don't get fair play, it turns a man agin racin' as a purfession, blessed if it don't. You should ha' seen him 'spin' with Cantaloup—you know Cantaloup, Muster Ryle? Blowed if he didn't walk away from him, jist like nothin'!—left him as if he'd been a standin' still, he did; and Cantaloup ain't a bad 'oss neither."

"You don't mean the horse that won the Oaks two years ago?" asked Bob.

"Yes, but I do mean the 'oss as won the Hoaks tew yeer ago. Now come, sir, you're a gent as knows if a 'oss is a 'oss, I know; jist carst yer eye over him, and give us your candid opinion."

The Cardinal was led forth, and walked up and down; and Bob did cast his eye over him, and liked him much.

"Clap a saddle on him, Robert," cries Docketer, seeing that the poison was working. "He's entered for the Spring, Mr. Ryle, as you knows; but I don't mind a showin' him to you, gents, has I knows you're hon the square. There's haction, there's 'ocks, there's hevery-think!"

As Bob watched the tremendous stride of Lord Lundy-foot's favourite, and heard a running fire of, "fit as a fiddle!" "quiet as a sheep!" "'andy as a lady's maid!" "pink as a cherry!" and so on, from Mr. Docketer, he became impressed with a desire to own such a horse; the light in his eyes must have said as much, for Ryle whispered to Docketer, "Don't be afraid of price Docketer: he'll have him."

Round the paddock went the object of these machinations, his head out, his tail well carried, his ears cocked, and the heavy bit bringing his legs well under him at

every stride. Seen through the medium of half a bottle of old brown sherry, and a five mile drive bristling with horse-talk, he looked, to Bob's eyes, as though Lord Lundyfoot's encomium on him were correct enough, and when Robert, the weazened groom, brought him up with his forelegs on rising ground, and his coat shining like a star, Bob could not refrain from an exclamation of pleasure.

"Take him in agin," says Docketer, tenderly feeling the legs of the "crack." "Take him in agin. Them coves is allus a spying round, and there's tew much money on him for my likin'."

Bob ran his hand down the massive forelegs.

"Sound as a bell, ain't 'em?" asked Docketer. "We don't break 'em down here—we don't; but, lor, you might ride that ere 'oss till his tail dropped off, and he wouldn't show nothink."

"Come round the stable, gents; and I'll show you what I can. That's Bambino, that is, wot took all the money from the French nob's; and that's Blue-light. *He's* a likely-looking 'oss, now. 'Ere's a Packtolium filly. Lot's o' blood *she* 'as,—and that one in the corner is Tippetty-witchet, by Grimaldi out of Pantaloon's dam."

Bob looked, and saw clearly that none of them were up to "The Cardinal's" standard, and said so—an expression of opinion which Mr. Docketer had been waiting for.

"Ah! you're right; *you* knows a 'oss, you does. But, lor bless yer! *He's* too good for us, that's just about it. We don't want no Darby winners 'ere, we don't."

"Why don't you sell him then?" asked Ryle, who had performed the feat of abusing his own horses with much grace.

"Sell him! Why, who'd buy him, arter the way he's been treated? The public as reads the noospapers thinks he's jest fit for dog's meat, as *you* know, Muster Dacre."

Dacre said that he believed that there was a bad impression about the horse, but he should think that Mr. Docketer could easily sell him if he wished.

"Don't know," returned Docketer. "I ain't a going to let him go under his vally—not if I loses my last shillin' on him. Tew thousand pounds is 'is figure, Muster Dacre; and if I takes a penny less, may I never lay my

leg over hanything higher than a donkey. Shut 'em up, Bob! Gen'elmen, come down to the 'ouse, and 'ave a glass of sherry and a biscuit?"

"I'm afraid it's rather late, Docketer," says Ryle; "but, however, I don't mind just one glass."

The one glass became four, and then Bob began to wax merry.

"Shall I ask him for the money?" said he to Ryle.

"I'll do it, if you like," said Ryle.

Docketer, who was in the middle of an apocryphal story, concerning a mare that ought to have won the Liverpool steeplechase, and didn't, was interrupted by Ryle saying in a confidential tone,

"Mr. Docketer, I want to ask you a favour. The fact is that Mr. Calverly came out here with me, in order to transact a little business with you."

Docketer was used to this sort of thing from his principal, and expressed his readiness to be of service.

"Mr. Calverly wants to borrow two thousand."

"Werry okard just now," says Docketer; "werry okard. I've got most of my money out, and I'm rayther pressed. Tew thousand is a large sum. If it was a 'oss, now?"

"Like the Cardinal, eh?" laughed Ryle.

"Yes, he's a magnificent horse," said Bob.

"Not for sech as you, sur—with all respect," says Docketer. "That's a 'oss wot ought ter be the property of a nobleman—*he* ought. Why, he's engaged knee deep all over England!"

"He needn't break his engagements because he belonged to me," says Bob, a little nettled.

"Werry true, sur—werry true; but then you see that I've been a puttin' of my money on 'im, and if he gets into 'ands as don't know 'ow to 'andle 'im, why, wot becomes of me?"

"I tell you what!" cries Bob; "I'll give you your price for him, if you will lend me the two thousand."

Mr. Docketer laughed cheerily.

"Lor, sur; why, that 'ud be throwing a good 'orse after bad money! Begging your pardon, sur.—No. I'll tell you what I'll do, if you're so sweet on the 'oss, I let you

'ave 'im for tew thousand cash, and that's more than I'd do for any human bein'—barrin' personal friends."

Two thousand cash was beyond Bob's wildest dreams, "I'll give you a bill," he said.

"Werry liberal of yer, indeed, sur; but, with all doo respect to a friend of Mr. Ryle's, I couldn't do nothink but cash with *that* 'oss."

"Come, Docketer; I tell you what I'll do," cries Ryle. "You lend Mr. Calverly two thousand, and I'll back his bill for the horse."

"Well, Muster Ryle," said Docketer, who began to see how the land lay, "it goes again my heart to refuse you, it does; but I can't let that 'oss go for less than cash."

"Pooh! nonsense; my name is as good as money in the city."

"Well, look here now," cried the dealer, as though he had hit upon a capital way of putting things pleasantly. "You give me your bill for fower thousand pund, and I'll lend Mr. Calverly the money."

"Oh no!" cries Bob; "I couldn't think of such a thing."

"I shall be happy to back anybody's bill, for any reasonable sum," says Dacre, out of a distant chair.

"I knows you would be, Muster Dacre; you're allus ready to oblige a friend, *you* are," and Docketer laughed inwardly as he thought what a pleasant time the sunburnt young man would have of it. "But I can't do business like that, gen'elmen; it ain't in my line, and I don't understand it."

"I'll tell you what it is," says Ryle. "You let Mr. Calverly have the horse and the money, and I'll back *this* bill with Mr. Dacre; will that do?"

After some further demur, Docketer agreed that it would do, and the requisite document was signed and delivered.

"I'll give Mr. Calverly a cheque, Docketer," says Ryle, "and you can give me the balance of our account the next time we meet."

Bob thought this rather a curious arrangement, but as, on passing through the gate, Mr. Ryle took occasion to observe that "he'd known Docketer for years, and would trust him with untold gold," the simple-minded Australian thought no more.

"What shall I do with the 'oss?" asked the model of trustworthiness, as the phaeton dashed up the gravel.

"Keep him until you hear from me," says Bob. "You can give him exercise as usual."

"That of course, sir," replied Docketer. "I'll look a'ter 'im as if he was my own."

"Who's that swell, Muster Docketer?" asked the weazened groom, as the phaeton drove off.

"He's a Hostralian, that's what *he* is. *He* comes from the country where yer pick up nuggets in the streets. He'll have to go back agin and pick up some more, I'm thinking, if he goes on like he's a doin' of! Tew thousand pound for that old bullock!" he muttered, *sotto voce*, as he glanced at the low line of buildings where the unconscious Cardinal was reposing. "Tew thousand pound! Oh lor, oh lor!" and his soliloquy terminated in a guffaw, which caused Robert to wonder "what devilment master had been up tew."

"Here's a cheque, my dear sir, and I wish you success with your new purchase," said Ryle, when they reached the house. "I shall be very happy to see you whenever you come down this way."

Bob departed with a light heart, and his good-humour seemed to have infected Dacre, for he laughed and joked incessantly all the way home.

"I should like to win with that horse!" cried Bob.

"Nothing would delight me more than to see you do so," said Dacre, "but it's heavy odds against you."

"I'll try, by George!"

"Do, my dear fellow! I'll give you every assistance I can!"

"You are a very good fellow, Dacre, upon my word, and I am more obliged to you than I can tell."

Dacre laughed.

"Bob," said he, "did you ever hear of the story of the man who went all over the world to look for treasure and, upon coming home, found it at his own door?"

"No!" said Bob.

"I'll lend you the book one of these days; it is uncommonly clever and amusing!"

CHAPTER XXII.

POLITICAL PLOTS.

WHEN Dacre said that Wheales had "spoken" of the ingenuous Binns, he did not tell an absolute untruth. The mighty Reformer had spoken of the sucking Leaguer, but in a very casual and unimpressive manner. The Branch of the Association to which Binns was secretary was an important one. It embraced many mechanics and skilled workmen, and was, perhaps, more intelligent and less bloodthirsty than others of its kind. It is true that the oratory heard at its meetings was not Demosthenic, but it was straightforward and to the purpose. The questions agitated were no useless quibbles upon Cromwell or Magna Charta; they were palpable, easy, every-day notions about work and wages. Honest men of the better class put down their names on the subscription list, and came week after week to hear the Doric eloquence of their brethren. There was much nonsense talked, of course, and the usual amount of plagiarised sentimentality about "hearths and homes," and "rights," and "horny hands," and so on; but the men knew what they meant.

Societies of this kind are the political universities of the people, and they soon learn to sift the chaff from the wheat of democratic discussion. If they did not succeed in raising wages or lowering import duties, they developed their governing instincts, and found out that they were not beasts of burden merely. Constant organisation is not without its results; and, if the working men did nothing else, they learnt that they must sacrifice individual interests to attain a position as a body.

Putting aside the exquisite pleasure of telling a superior that they "were as good as he," there is a fascination to men who possess quick sympathies and little education, fierce prejudices, and feeble reasoning power, in feeling that though as units they are despised, as a body they are feared, and that the master who despises the working man, respects the Working Men's Association.

To guide these men to their impossible goal was Binns's ambition. He was young, enthusiastic, and not without

talent. His eloquence was of that fiery, youthful sort which is so good to hear, and so silly to read. He was illogical often, impassioned and earnest always. The great secret in talking to masses is to let them see that you believe in the sentiments you deliver; above all, to talk continuously, and to keep your best argument for the last. Binns was happy in this respect. Though only a grocer's apprentice, he was gifted with some natural talent, and a desperate industry, that almost supplied the place of genius. He was made secretary to the Association, and he made an impression. Men called him an "uncommon clever feller," and nodded their heads approvingly. He was listened to with an attention which was not vouchsafed to older speakers. He was spoken of amongst the heads as a useful man. In a word, he was just on the edge of the whirlpool.

In the meantime the popular agitation was as noisy as ever. The late Government had hitherto done nothing towards retrieving their position, and the Conservative journals began dimly to hint at the horrors of a Whig ministry. The Radicals were in high glee. Their party was in the ascendant at last, they thought, and the ark that held the New Moses fairly launched upon the waters.

The Earl of Foozleton had not recovered the blow dealt by the hand of Master Cyril. Ministries have been made and marred by lesser men before now, but the iron had entered into the ex-premier's soul, and he was bitter against his enemy. To be overthrown by fair means would have been nothing, but to be ignominiously pulled down from his high estate by the treachery of a boy at college, was something unprecedented in Lord Foozleton's political recollections; and he inwardly vowed that, if it should ever be in his power, he would return the debt with interest.

"This is the age of political adventurers," he would say, in his confidential moments; "but they play a risky game, and if they lose it they have no chance to recoup themselves."

There was much talk in "private circles" as to the new ministry. The "old stagers" averred that it was impossible that the Liberals could muster strongly enough.

"We must have a compromise," said they. "The 'trimmers' will have it. Public feeling is all for the 'Rads,' but they can't do it, sir—they can't do it!"

So thought the private secretary of Lord Nantwich, and so thought, perhaps, Lord Nantwich himself. That gentleman had long been waiting for such a chance as this. He stood well with each party, and his policy had been to "wait." Though the Tories had given him his place, he had not pledged himself to the Tory party, and he was now prepared "for either fortune." Careful to a fault, quiet and reserved, he had long passed as a "man of sound common sense;" and perhaps none but his secretary knew how little he deserved the position he held. Mr. Rupert Dacre had been playing for high stakes, and took care to inform himself of the chances of the game. Lord Nantwich was his trump card, and he was in no hurry to play him. But he saw an opening now. He had not wasted his time. Nantwich looked upon him as his right-hand man, and had repeatedly given him to understand that, were he ever in power, he would not forget him. In the present condition of things he urged his chief to action.

"We want a moderate man, my lord," he would say—"a man who has friends on both sides of the House. It is impossible to permit Liberalism to carry the day, and yet we dare not run the risk of a defeat of the Conservatives. Foozleton's cabinet has gone to utter wreck, and it is absurd to attempt to reinstate it, even partially. Why do not you, my dear lord, take the tide at the flood? The late Government would rather see you at the head of their successors than anybody else; and the Liberals would support you against the Tories, because you are pledged to no extreme measures."

"I am afraid to run the risk—it might end in a fatal rupture with both parties."

"I think not. Moreover, the 'half-measure' men are numerous, and would hail your accession to office as a solution of a difficulty which they are afraid to face. If I might presume to advise your lordship, I would suggest that you should begin to make advances."

So by degrees it began to be bruited abroad that a

third party was in course of formation. Despite the attacks of the Radical papers, and the sneers of the *haute école*, such formation was looked upon with favour; and Lord Nantwich was spoken of as the Coming Man. In vain did the more furious of either side murmur of "incapacity," and hint that the late Secretary for Foreign Affairs was *effete* and incompetent; he began to be looked upon as an excellent "stop gap" by the more moderate and less sanguine.

The fact was, as Grosmith put it one night at the Pegasus—"Everybody's afraid of everybody else, and as they can't settle who shall knock under, they'll go in for compromise."

"The passion for comfort will carry the day, depend on it," said Dacre. "Most Englishmen are just educated enough to be negative. They like the people—at a distance; they preach the Gospel—in evening dress and white kid gloves. We shall establish a Negative party."

"Who will support you?" asked a young disciple of Matthew Arnold, who drank Maraschino and water, and tempered his unbelief with an infusion of Fine Arts.

"Why, *you* will! You like to talk about Democracy, but you don't like to touch it. You prate about Culture, because culture is exceptional. You are very hard upon Religion as long as the People go to church, but when 'infidelity begins to smell of candle-grease,' as Heine says, you vote it vulgar, and talk about Neo-platonism. You tell the people that they are fools to suffer in silence, but when they speak, you laugh because they drop their h's."

"Well, perhaps I do," said the young man, with a smile; "but for all that, I 'go in' for the 'Masses,' you know;" and with that he rang for a waiter to give him a book that was lying on the next table.

"Hang the 'Masses!'" cries little Figleaf, whose father was a grocer, and whose grandfather first saw the light of day in a gutter in the Haymarket—"I hate the 'great unwashed' myself."

"T-they will be tutoo st-st-rong for you y-yet," stammered Randon, "m-mark my words, D-D-Dacre. I have st-studied the signs of the tut-to-times, and I own, I f-fwankly

own that I *am* well up in Pup-political Ec-cuck-cuck-onomy."

Dacre got up to go. "Perhaps that stammering booby is right," he muttered, as he walked slowly home. "I have a very great mind to speak to the scorbatic admirer of Mrs. Chatteris. By the way, that reminds me I must call upon that little lady. 'Pon my soul, it is a weary life—this constant plotting and scheming. If I only had plenty of money and a good position, I'd settle down to be 'good!' But then—I haven't!"

Following out this train of reflection, he wrote a note to Binns, in which he expressed a wish to see him at the Office.

Binns took the letter to Bland.

Bland hummed and ha'ed over it, and finally told him that he had better take care what he was about. "You can't serve two masters, you know," said he.

"Oh, *I'm* all right!" cries Binns, with youthful self-confidence. "He won't get much out of me."

So he went, and was received by the astute secretary in a room littered with papers, and teeming with officialism.

"Glad to see you, my dear sir. Sit down. I expect our Italian budget in directly, and we have not much time to talk."

Binns sat on the edge of his chair and said nothing.

"The fact is that I wanted to speak to you. I have taken an interest in you, Mr. Binns—if you will not feel offended at the expression—and as we are always on the look-out for 'new blood' here, I wished to have a little conversation."

Binns said that he imagined "new blood" was the last thing sought in the Foreign Office.

"In the Foreign Office—yes. In political circles—no. In the present state of affairs, my dear sir, no one can know better than yourself that extreme anxiety is felt by all parties."

This was vague, but true, and Binns could do nothing but bow assent.

"The formation of a new party is a ticklish thing, you understand, and we find it impossible to pass over those

young men who are—if I may use the term—the Freelances of Young England.”

Binns grew hot. Was he going to offer him a “place”?

“The old method of ‘favouritism’ is dying out, and the Government has discovered that in order to rule the people it must conciliate the leaders of the people.”

Binns blushed.

“Now you, Mr. Binns, have shown yourself in a marked manner to be one of our most rising speakers. I do not mean that you have achieved any success hitherto which is out of the common, but your speeches—which I hear of regularly—display an amount of consistency which is rare in so young a man. You know I am much older than you, my dear sir, and may take liberties.”

Binns coughed, and blushed again. The calm, smiling, bearded gentleman, surrounded with official documents, and sitting—as it seemed—at the receipt of foreign custom, did appear centuries older, and leagues higher in social position.

“Now I think, Mr. Binns, and I say it with all due respect to your private feelings, that you have done wrong in committing yourself to the Mob. Mobocracy will never prevail in England. Liberalism may. I should be loth to offend your prejudices, but if I may speak of self-interest to a disinterested man, I should urge that the Government holds out more rewards and more hope of political success than any ‘Association,’ however powerful.”

Binns flushed redder this time. Was the secretary offering him a bribe to betray his friends? He would be firm, and refuse.

“Do you mean—?”

“I mean nothing at all, my dear sir. I simply throw out a friendly hint for your future guidance. You may think it strange that I, who possess the confidence of the Earl of Nantwich, and am—undeservedly, I admit—of some importance in the political world, should broach these subjects to you. My dear sir, we do not always confine ourselves to foreign policy at the Foreign Office—at least, I do not. I am, my dear sir, like yourself, an aspirant for political honours, and I like to know that men of my own stamp of thought agree with me.”

Binns was paralysed. The compliment was too great, and it fairly choked him.

"I am very proud—very proud," he stammered, "of your good opinion."

"Oh, pooh—that goes without saying—I am only too glad to have had the opportunity of expressing my sentiments towards you. I should like to see you in a better position than you are now, Mr. Binns, as a friend of a friend of mine—for I believe that Chatteris and yourself are intimate?"

"W-well, not exactly intimate," said Binns.

"Well, you know each other, at all events; and he has often spoken of you to me. I wished to point out to you that an opportunity is now coming which you will do wrong to lose sight of. You should join us, my dear sir."

"How?" cried Binns, in utter astonishment.

"Belong to the new Party—the Party of Young England—the Party that stands midway between the two extremes of political faction. We have neither the blind rage of Democracy nor the stolid indifference of the Aristocracy. We are the Party of Intellect, and our aim is to reconcile the conflicting elements in the social world, and while placing the working man on the pedestal of his own integrity and honesty, to make the culture of the middle classes and the wealth of the upper, combine to cast out the devils of *insouciance* and neglect from the body politic. Do you comprehend?"

Binns did not, of course, the least in the world, but the studied tones, affected enthusiasm, and carefully-used catch-phrases had caught him, and he thought that he was listening to a new gospel.

"It is a grand scheme," said he.

"Then you will be with us? But we must not show our cards, you know. We have a difficult game to play, and must be careful. The English mechanic, down-trodden for centuries, is incapable of appreciating the idea of moderation. You yourself can, of course, at once understand the whole plan of operations, but it will never do to show the Mysteries to the crowd, you know. Now good-bye. Keep this little conversation a secret, and we will work in concert."

Binns promised, and bowed, and retired.

He went home upon air. He was accepted—picked out as a recruit for a new political Party of Culture and Intellect, and goodness knows what beside. He strove to exactly understand what this Party was to do, but beyond general philanthropy and “uniting” everyone, he could not see the ultimate result of its operations. His ambition, however, was attained. He was in politics at last!

As the door closed on his visitor, Dacre threw himself back in his chair and laughed hugely. “What a consummate ass the fellow is!” he cried. “Now I’ll go and see Mrs. Chatteris.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

RUPERT DACRE IN A NEW RÔLE.

CYRIL was getting weary of his life. He had conquered his wife, and he was tired of her. He had attempted to write again, but found that he had not so much to say as formerly. Blister complained that “he was getting dull,” and the young man was fain to acknowledge that the editor’s uncomplimentary statement was correct.

The truth was, that, not having formed any clear opinions about anything, he was obliged to confine himself to smart generalities, and smart generalities began to be difficult to discover. He was haunted, too, by a vision of the pure grey eyes and slender figure of his cousin.

He met Bob Calverly the night after that young man had succeeded in purchasing the “Cardinal,” and Bob Calverly had asked him why he didn’t go down to Matcham. “You might go and have a look at the Hall, you know,” said Bob; “it is getting emptied now, I expect. Come down.”

He scarcely liked to leave his wife again, but the temptation was strong.

“Are you going down?” he asked.

“No,” said Bob, wincing. “No—I’ve got some business in town. The fact is, that I’ve bought a horse that I

want to pull off at Chester with, and I must stay here for a bit to see how he gets on."

"A horse! What horse?" asked Cyril, lazily.

"The Cardinal."

Cyril started. "You don't expect to win with *him*, do you?"

"I hope so," said Bob, cheerily.

"Well, he ruined poor Lundyfoot."

"I know all about that, but I fancy him a little myself. Would you like to come out and have a look at him?"

Cyril, always alive to the chance of making money, consented, and the two went out next day together.

The Cardinal was brought out and galloped, and inspected, and put through a severe course of leg-feeling and rib-punching.

"He's too heavy for my taste," said Cyril, who had a weakness for "weeds." "Where did you get him?"

"From a man called Docketer."

"Oh!" and Cyril mentally resolved to "put on the pot" against the Australian's "fancy" without delay.

He did not tell Bob so, however, but contented himself with observing that "horseflesh was always dangerous to meddle with, and that, for his part, he didn't care about the turf."

"No, I know you are an intellectual fellow, and all that," said Bob, a little contemptuously, and the matter dropped.

When Cyril got home he was still thinking about Matcham, and interrupted his wife's playing after dinner by saying.

"Carry dear, I've been thinking that I ought to go down to see my father."

Carry turned round quickly.

"You are always going away, Cyril," she pouted; and then seeing the ominous cloud begin to gather on her husband's brow, she added, "but if you *must* go, of course, I can't help it."

"Of course you can't, so don't argue—there's a good girl. I shan't be long away; but they will begin to suspect that something is wrong if I don't go near them."

"Ah! Cyril, I wish you would tell your father about our marriage."

Cyril rose angrily.

"I *can't*," he said. "I have told you so before, and it is useless to harp upon the subject. You have no consideration for *my* position. I shall go down to-morrow for a week."

Carry turned round again to the piano, and dashed off a *bravura*. As she sang, she could feel something rising and falling on her bosom—something that rustled faintly. When the door was shut upon her husband, her fingers wandered mechanically over the keys, and a bright flush rose in her cheeks. At last she stopped playing altogether, and by and by she took the something from her breast. It was a little note, written in a bold, clear hand, and the seal was yet unbroken.

"I meant to give him this to-night," she said, "but I won't now."

And she opened it. It was very short, and couched in the most ordinary terms:

"MY DEAR MRS. CHATTERIS,—I propose to do myself the honour of calling upon you to-morrow afternoon, as I have a message from Mrs. Manton. With kind regards to Cyril,

"I am, very faithfully yours,

"RUPERT DACRE."

"To-morrow afternoon, and He will be away. I ought not to see him, yet he says he has a message from mamma. How kind he is, to take so much trouble about me!"

So she did not tell her husband, and the note was torn up.

The next day was a weary one. Cyril had departed early in the morning, and Carry was left alone. She wandered about the house and tried to sing, and tried to read, and looked out of the window, and walked up and down the little garden, and finally determined to go out. But by the time she had arrived at this determination it was late in the afternoon; and, as she still lingered, she heard the wheels of Dacre's cab, and the next moment Dacre himself entered the drawing-room.

Rupert had come, determined on conquest. He had set his heart upon the "little woman" of whom he had

spoken so disparagingly; and he was not the man to let a chance escape. The unsuspecting Bob had told him that it was probable that Cyril would go down to Loamshire, and Dacre had chosen his opportunity well.

Carry received him coldly enough, but all her self-command could not prevent a blush when he took her hand.

"How is Cyril?" was his first inquiry.

"My husband has gone down to his father's," said she.

Rupert hugged himself at the thought, but he simply said,

"I am sorry, for I wanted to see him."

"What for?"

"Why, you see that I am in constant correspondence with Mr. Saville Chatteris, and I fear that, unless Master Cyril takes care, he will get into a scrape."

Carry bit her lips.

"Can you help him?"

"Yes; but he is so self-willed and headstrong. *You* must have found that out."

"Did you not say that you have a message from my mother?"

"Oh! merely an inquiry about you. She is anxious, you know."

Carry was silent. Her married life had taken some of the bloom off the peach of romance, and she was wise enough to know that Mr. Dacre would not come down to see her because her mother had been inquiring after her.

"Is that all?"

"No; the fact is, my dear Mrs. Chatteris, I came down because I wanted to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes. Did you show my letter to Cyril?"

"I did not."

Dacre could scarcely suppress a smile.

"I am glad of that. He might not have liked my visiting you."

"Why should he not?"

"Because he is ashamed of his marriage."

"Mr. Dacre!"

And she rose hastily.

"Listen to me, my dear madam, for one moment. I am older than you are, and you will not, I trust, be offended at what I am going to say. I have known your husband from a boy, and I am sorry to say that I have not found him as candid with me as I could wish. I have seen you with him several times, and when I asked him who you were he did not tell me the truth."

"The truth!"

"He denied that you were his wife."

The blow was cruelly dealt, and it took effect. Poor little Carry burst into tears. Dacre was by her side in an instant. Her hand was in his, and before she could prevent him he pressed it to his lips.

"Pardon me for giving you pain, but I must tell you the truth at all hazards."

"What do you mean sir?"

She was summing up all her recollection of novelistic lore to aid her in this strait.

"Rise, sir!" she cried, in a tone that was meant to be tragic, but which was only absurd.

Dacre did not stir.

"You silly girl! Do you think that I would tell you this if I did not know it? Ah! believe me, the telling pains me—as much as the hearing does you."

"Mr. Dacre, you have no right to speak like this to me. If Cyril were here you would not dare—"

"But he is not here. Do you know where he has gone? To see his cousin."

"His cousin!"

"His cousin, Miss Ffrench. They are engaged to be married—people say."

This was too much. Her tears redoubled. She buried her face in her hands.

He stood and watched her with an evil smile on his face.

"You may not believe it, but it is true."

"I do not believe it," said she, between her sobs.

"Then I have done. I have told you, because I promised that I would tell you."

"Promised whom?"

"Myself."

She did not even raise her face to look at him. Her heart was full of emotions that she dared not analyse. All her fears came thronging to her heart and knocked for entrance. Her quiet, almost secret marriage; her seclusion; her husband's strange indifference; his refusal to acknowledge her as his wife; his change of name; all these things came up before her, and she trembled.

"But he dare not leave his wife for another woman," she said, at last, in so low a tone that the ears of the attentive listener almost failed to catch the words.

"A man who is in love dare do anything."

"Oh! Mr. Dacre, this is not true—say it is not, and I will forgive your intrusion here. I will forget the words you have dared to speak; only say it is not true."

He was pitiless.

"It is true. He does not love you, and he has deceived you."

"No, he has not deceived me. He is my husband, even though he does not love me."

Dacre saw that he must change his tactics.

"You give too much meaning to my words," he said. "I did not say that he was not your husband. Come, be calm. This infatuation *may* be only a passing folly, and he is not, perhaps, as guilty as I feared. You must forgive me for speaking to you as I have done. It was for your good, believe me. You are young and inexperienced. I am neither. I would be your friend if you will let me. Will you?"

Poor little Carry! she was in a trap. Her own instinct told her that she should check this sort of conversation; but she was unhappy, and the low tones were so sweet and—well, she was not well-principled, and she was a woman.

Dacre took her hand in his.

"Good-bye," he said. "I will come and see you sometimes, and I will find out more about this unhappy business. Perhaps we may save him yet."

* * * * *

"I think that the bird is netted," said he to himself, as he stopped to light a cigar out of eyeshot of the little villa. "I was afraid that I had frightened her at first."

I suppose she *is* his wife. If so, I have got the young gentleman in my power. Dear me, what fools boys are, to be sure!"

With which sage reflection he was so delighted that he gazed complacently into the sky, and, in consequence, ran against a young man who was hastening in the opposite direction.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dacre!"

It was Binns. He, in his turn, had a surprise; for, as he turned the corner he saw a girlish figure standing at the window of one of the cottages, and he recognised his lost love.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT MATCHAM.

CYRIL'S visit was unexpected. He was received somewhat coldly by his father, but it was not his father that he went to see. It was his cousin. He was in love with her, and he confessed to himself that he was in love for the first time. He had married too hastily. He did not love his wife. She was too simple, too childish. He had made the mistake of his life, and he admitted it to himself, with inward groanings and sighings. The sweet eyes of Kate lured him on to his doom, and he forgot all beside. He knew that he was doing a base and cowardly action, but he had no strength to resist. He kissed the axe, and was content. Moreover, Kate seemed colder, and her coldness made him more eager in pursuit of her. He knew she loved him, and as he roamed aimlessly about the leafless woods and gloomy glades of Matcham, he cursed himself for his folly.

He was afraid to remain alone with his cousin, yet he could not resist the temptation of seeking such opportunities. He would say bitter things to her, and rail about the uselessness of woman, and the follies of the age. He would take sudden interest in her music, or her singing, and then affect to have forgotten all about it when he next met her. He would ask for a particular song, and

then pretend to have forgotten that he had asked for it. He would go into the room where she was, and then affect supreme indifference to her presence.

This conduct puzzled her. She dared not refer to his confession of love for her, and yet she hoped that he might himself refer to it. He dared not speak to her, and yet longed to take her in his arms and tell her all.

"She will hate me," he thought. "I dare not tell her;" and then he would resolve to brave all risks and trust to her love for him. But he dared not, for his heart told him that she would not hate, but despise him.

So both were miserable, and ate their own hearts silently.

When Kate saw that her lover held aloof, maiden pride came to her assistance, and she assumed an indifference that she did not feel. She tried to read her own heart, in vain. She was dimly conscious, though she told herself twenty times a day that she loved Cyril, that yet that love was not as perfect as she could wish it. She loved, she thought, but it was not the love of her dreams, the pure self-sacrificing, all-sufficient love that she had—like other women—pictured to herself as the end of her youth and the crowning glory of her womanhood. She seemed to have had her eyes opened, and to see that Cyril was not the hero she had made him. He was the same, and yet different. He was the same graceful, clever, daring boy she had known him; but the light in his eyes was colder, and his voice was harsher, and the golden halo of romance with which she had surrounded him had paled its lustre. She fought against the feeling in vain; the cold, *distract*, cynical young man was not the Cyril of old times—the Cyril that was enthusiastic and poetic, and on fire with youth and ambition.

But she said that she loved him, and so she would not listen to these suspicious promptings.

The days passed on, and no conclusion had been arrived at. Lady Loughborough drove out, and ate and drank, and was merry. Saville Chatteris passed his mornings in riding over the estate, and his evenings in reading in the library. Kate and Cyril were constantly together, and at last the storm burst.

The day had been dull and cold, and the night had set in with a wild wind and furious intermittent rain. Cyril was seated in a corner, with an open book on his knees, gazing into vacancy. Kate was playing strange snatches of old songs, and singing the while in a low voice, that nevertheless rang clear and distinct through the silent room.

Cyril raised his eyes and watched her. The graceful *pose*, the upturned face, the softly-falling hair, touched his sense of beauty, and he felt his heart beat quicker. Just then the unconscious girl glided off into some old silly, childish song about love and youth, and blisses and kisses, and all the old poetical nonsense that our fathers sang to our mothers in the days that are dead. Cyril rose, and went to the piano. She stopped suddenly, and their eyes met.

He took her hand and kissed it. She shuddered.

"Kate, my darling, why are you so cold?"

There was no reply, but the fair head drooped, and the soft clasp of the fingers tightened. He grew more reckless, and took her in his arms.

She took his hot kisses without a word, but the sudden change from indifference to love was too much for her, and she burst into tears.

Then the lava-stream broke forth. He poured forth a wild, incoherent medley of love and passion, and marriage. His fierce lips covered her hands and hair with kisses, and his own were salt with her tears. She was terrified at his vehemence, and struggled to be free, but he held her fast.

"My love, how I have suffered for you! I have longed for you, dreamt of you, hungered for a touch of your hand, a glance from your eyes. I have been living a life of torture since I saw you. I have tried to forget you, but I could not. Kate, my love! Kate, my wife—"

He did not know what he said. He had never checked a thought or a desire since he knew how to think, and he was borne headlong down the stream of his own passions.

"Will you not answer me, Kate? Say that you love me—one word, only one. You love me, dearest, do you

not? You will be mine; you will be my wife, darling? Kate, answer me!"

She could not speak for sobbing, but she turned her face to his and their lips met. Then she broke from his arms, and he was alone.

The first moment of triumph over, he was stunned. What had he done? Engaged himself to his cousin, and his wife was yet alive! What should he do? How escape? He might tell all, but then—then he would be for ever despised and hated. He would lose his love, and he could not bear to lose it. His prevailing selfishness made him afraid to retract. His wife! He thought of her with disgust. All her faults of manner and lack of breeding rose up before him. She had no virtues—only the loving him—and he was weary of that. Let her go. He dared not think how, even with the thrill of Kate's kiss upon his lips. He cursed himself for marrying her; he cursed her for entrapping him; he cursed all who were party to the shameful lie he had enacted, when, in the shabby London church, he promised to love and protect a woman whom he now knew he hated. Suddenly there came up before him a vision. He remembered how, on the steps of the gambling-house in Jermyn Street, Dacre had asked him if he had married the woman who called herself his wife, and how he had denied that marriage. He remembered, too, how at the time a vague feeling of jealousy had possessed him. Jealousy! He was not jealous now.

Why should he be bound for life to a woman whom he despised? His eyes were opened, and he knew that in marrying the soft-eyed, silly little woman, who had crept into his heart, he had ruined his social prospects for ever. Cyril Chatteris was not one of those men who could be content with honesty and honour. His vanity would not allow him to rest satisfied. He would willingly have married Carry, and set to work to gain bread for himself and her, if the world would have applauded the doing; but he could not conceal from himself the fact that his friends would laugh at him, and that the whole fabric of Don Juanism and gentlemanly profligacy, which he had been at such pains to raise, would crumble away to nothingness. He could not bear to have it said that

Cyril Chatteris, the cynical, brilliant, Byronic, experienced Cyril Chatteris should have been "caught" by the ill-educated daughter of an ignorant lodging-housekeeper. He had been a fool, he owned it. He could never now be the darling of drawing-rooms, the caressed of women, the cynosure of lady-like virginity. His father would disinherit him, his relatives would look down on him, and his friends would laugh at him. He had not the courage, he confessed, to take the woman who had trusted him to his heart, and defy the world with her. He was a coward—he knew it. Moreover, he loved Kate. That worldly sentiment of "honour," which the basest and most reckless libertine possesses, warned him to leave her, but he was too weak. He refused to look his position in the face. He would "stand the hazard of the die." All might be well, and even if all were ill, he cared not. He would not draw back. He had avowed his love, and his love had been returned. He would run all risks now.

He sat down to think, and in his mind there arose an idea which, as he thought of it, filled him with fear, and disgust at himself. Yet if his baseness were unknown to all save himself, he would not be base. The motto of his life had been—"not to leave undone, but to keep unknown." "I was jealous of her once," he repeated, "but I am not jealous now."

CHAPTER XXV.

PRINCIPALLY AMATORY.

MR. CALVERLY, stopping in London and spending his newly-made money regally, found himself an object of interest. That circle of condemned souls—"the outside betting ring"—had heard of his purchase, and comment was rife. Greedy men in Newmarket coats and hard impenetrable hats, were eager for the laying of odds. Small, wispy, insignificant men, whose stony eyes were sphinx-like in their impenetrability, waxed loud in their condemnation of Lord Lundyfoot's favourite. The mighty tide of betting set in with resistless force against Mr.

Calverly, and the Cardinal's market price was startlingly below par. The flimsy betting lists that were "sent post free for eighteen penny stamps," contained his name with a terrible array of figures against the solitary unit that represented the "points in his favour." He had no friends; and, as Mr. Docketer sententiously observed, after an ineffectual attempt to oblige Bob and "put something on" by commission, "The public won't look at the 'oss, not at no price." His frequent failures had disgusted the prophets, and they prophesied no more. But Bob was hot upon victory. He booked bets with a readiness and zeal that was quite martyr-like. At the clubs which he frequented, "Calverly's horse" had become a by-word, and the oracles of the turf shrugged their shoulders as he passed them at Tattersall's.

There was no lack of hawks to pounce upon this innocent pigeon. Even Welterwate had refused to "lay" any more against the Cardinal. "Calverly would take bets all day long," exclaimed that ingenuous young man, "and it ain't right to see a feller put in a hole, you know." Ponsonby had warned in vain, and Dacre, after pretending to argue, had himself booked three or four "good things," three or four times over.

The fact was that Bob had an "opinion," and was backing his opinion with severe conscientiousness. If he won, he would be not only released from all embarrassments, but be placed considerably on the windy side of care; if he lost, he would have to pay some five thousand pounds, or proclaim himself a defaulter. But he comforted himself with the assurance that he was sure to win. "They don't know what the horse can do," he said to himself, as on all sides rose the clamour of bookmakers and the Babel of betting. "The horse has never been fairly tried yet; and, unless I am mistaken, he can show them all the way home in a canter." With which flattering unction laid to his soul, he was impervious to advice and to irony. Moreover, his rejection by the woman he loved sat heavily on him. He did not talk about it, or mourn desolately in lonely places; he did not write poetry, or meditate suicide. He was too proud to let people see that he was miserable. But he became reckless

and careless. He was oftener mixed up in the revels of such *jeunesse dorée* as he claimed acquaintance with than heretofore. He paid more visits to the fascinating rooms of his accommodating friend, Mr. Ryle, and had achieved an *entrée* behind the scenes of minor theatres, where he would present bouquets and other matters to ill-educated fourth-rate actresses, and fancy himself in love with their pert airs and artificial graces. He became known as a "man upon town," and several gentlemen who lived by the application of their natural abilities to the science of whist, began to cultivate the acquaintance of the young fellow, and find it both agreeable and remunerative. His brown face was growing haggard, his brown hands white and shaky, and his once springy step languid and slow. He felt no desire to get rid of any excess of animal vigour by violent bodily exercise. Mr. Crosschopper, the bullet-headed pugilist who taught "gents," what he was pleased to call the "noblearter selfderfense," did not find his pupil so ready to come up again, after the customary knockings down; and Mr. Wulcher, the dog-fancier, explained to his sympathising circle that his patron had lost all interest in dogs, let them rat never so wisely.

Dacre noticed this abandonment to the pleasures of the minute, and was pleased to be pleasantly jocose thereon.

"Why, Bob, my boy, I believe you're in love!"

"No, I am not," says Bob, with an attempt at a cheerful laugh.

Dacre knocked the ash off his cigar tenderly, and took a long look at the supine form of his *protégé*.

"You look very like it. You used to be somewhat of a domestic turn, my Robert—a man given to admiration of tea-table virtues, and a never tiring squire of dames. You used to be unpleasantly severe in your moral code, too; and were quite an Australian John Knox in the way of denouncing those social amusements that 'sin against the strength of youth.' Now, you plunge headlong into bachelor gaiety, and eschew the company of those wise virgins who are keeping their matrimonial lamps so steadily burning. When a young gentleman of your turn of mind evinces a sudden dislike to 'lovely woman,' as good society presents her, he must be in love. Who is she?"

"Nonsense, Dacre."

"Exactly. Nonsense, of course, which, likewise, is the end of all things. Love is nonsense—so philosophers tell us."

"They have never been in love then," groaned Bob, goaded to admit something.

"Oh, dear me, yes, they have! That is the reason they speak so positively on the subject. It is painful while it lasts, but one gets over it. In old days one had time to fall in love with a woman. Now we all live so fast that I do not believe a man has time to know whom he ought to have married until his eldest son goes to college. Are you sure that you have fixed upon the right 'object,' my dear boy? Many young men of your impressionable temperament fancy themselves in love, and get married; and then, by Jove, sir, bricks without straw are nothing to it!"

Bob rolled about upon his sofa uneasily. He was eager to make someone his confidant, yet he did not know how to begin.

"What would you do now, Dacre, if you wanted to marry a girl?"

"Marry her"—said Dacre, with his eyes shut.

"Well—but—hang it—suppose she refused you?"

"Ask her again."

"Suppose she was in love with somebody else?"

"Cut him out."

"But suppose she loved him better?"

"In that improbable case, I should let her alone; because I should feel convinced that a merciful Providence had intervened to save me from marrying a woman of bad taste and worse judgment."

Despite his heart-sickness, poor Bob laughed.

"You have got a good idea of your own value," he said.

"My dear boy, I have 'lived my life,' as the German fellow says; and I have found out that one can marry ninety-nine women out of a hundred, if one only has pluck and opportunity."

"But suppose a man falls in love with the hundredth?" says Bob.

"That is his misfortune. But even then, judicious manœuvring may win her. You fellows are so confoundedly frightened! Women are merely human beings, my lovesick swain, and they don't *mind* being made love to as long as you do it according to their own idea of the tender passion. It is no use beating about the bush, you know. Why don't you go to your Beloved and tell her that you insist upon marrying her."

Bob's hair nearly stood on end at this daring proposal.

"My dear Dacre!"

"Of course I don't know the young woman, so I can't advise you as to your course of action; but you may depend upon it that, with the average 'girl of the period,' a little strength of mind is not out of place. Women, as a rule, hate bashful suitors."

"Were you ever in love, Dacre?"

"Yes, once; and if I had married the girl I should have been ruined for life."

"Wouldn't she have you?" asked Bob, who was becoming interested.

"Oh, yes! She would have had me fast enough. She was governess to one of my sisters—Lady Ellesmere that is now, you know—and I was at college. Fortunately my father stopped the thing in time, and sent me to Germany."

"Did you never see her again?"

"She wrote me a letter, all about love and duty, and so on, and forbade me to try and discover her. Of course I did try; but—contrary to the usual practice of women—she meant what she said, and left no address."

"Did you never see her again?"

"Yes. She writes books now, and put me into one under the name of Launcelot Lisle. The critics said the character was 'evidently drawn from the life.' 'Gad, so it was.'"

"She must be a clever girl," said Bob.

"Girl! My dear fellow, do you know Miss Meutrière?"

"What! the fat woman with the big eyes?"

"The same, I don't care about her now, you know, and she *hates* me."

"Then you never could have loved each other," said Bob, positively.

Dacre laughed.

"Hallo! my boy, are *you* going to moralise? By Jove! perhaps you are right though. What does it matter? When one reaches fifty a good dinner is better than all the love in the world."

"Not always!"

Dacre rose and put his hand, not unkindly, upon the young man's shoulder. Perhaps the conversation had touched some tender chord in that cynical heart of his, and set it vibrating to the old tune he had so long forgotten.

"Tell me who the woman is, old fellow. I daresay your case is not desperate."

"Miss Ffrench," cried Bob.

Dacre started. Despite his suspicions, he had not expected that so sudden a conclusion had been arrived at.

"And did she refuse you?"

"Yes."

"Any reason?"

"No; but" (here he gave a great gulp) "I think that she loves her cousin."

"Hum! She did not say so?"

"No; not in so many words—but—"

And Bob recounted what had passed between himself and Kate.

"So you left her?" said Dacre, when the story was finished. "You did not go back again, eh?"

"No: but as I shut the door I waited a minute, and I thought I heard a sob."

Rupert smiled.

"Did you? Ah! well, cheer up, old fellow, you are not in such bad case after all."

"Don't you think so?"

"I'll tell you what, old fellow, I will give you one piece of comfort."

"What?"

"This. Kate Ffrench will never marry Cyril Chatteris."

"Why not?"

"Ah! never mind. Will you trust me with your interest in the matter?"

Bob grasped his friend's hand.

"My dear Dacre, of course."

"Come, then, let us go and have dinner. Talking about love always makes me hungry."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"BLESS YOU, MY CHILDREN!"

CYRIL'S morning reflections upon the evening's work were not of a consolatory nature. It is not a pleasant feeling—the sudden waking up to the consciousness that you are miserable, and Cyril experienced it to its utmost extent. At first he felt almost inclined to go to his father, and make a "clean breast" of the matter, but he was not brave enough; so the curse of indecision overtook him again, and he temporised. He had half a mind to act a manly part for once in his life, and confess his misdeeds—to take the consequences, and, if need be, work for the woman he loved. But the sight of conscious Kate, blushing crimson over the breakfast cups, put all his good resolutions to flight.

Saville Chatteris was unusually cheerful and condescending.

"Ah, Cyril, good morning! Pray be seated. Kate, my dear, you look quite enchanting this morning."

This was gall and wormwood. Could she have told him? Impossible. Cyril said nothing, but sipped his coffee, and crumbled his toast in moody silence. Kate gave him his coffee-cup, and blushed as her hand met his; whereat, old Saville, who was not without his own experiences, smiled paternally, and Cyril winced. He was in for it now—sink or swim.

The fact was this: Kate had gone straight to her bedroom, and indulged in what young ladies term "a good cry," by which she relieved her nervous system and soaked two pocket-handkerchiefs. Collins, her maid, an astute and wary damsel, had long suspected the existence of something more than cousinly affection between the two young people, and had watched the growing love affair with all the interest that nine-and-thirty looks on sweet-and-twenty.

Kate pleaded headache; Collins recommended *eau de cologne*, and, during its administration, took occasion to ask when Mr. Cyril was going to leave. Kate shut her eyes at that, because she felt that she was blushing—much as an ostrich puts its head into a hole to hide from its pursuers. Collins smiled grimly, and went on talking relentlessly.

Kate lost her temper.

"You tire me, Collins; don't chatter so much! There, that will do; you can go!"

Whereupon Collins went straight to Lady Loughborough, who was reading a French novel in bed, and told her that she believed that "Mister Cyril had spoken to Miss Kate."

"Spoken, woman! What do you mean?"

"I mean, yer ladyship, that I believe he's proposed to her. The pore young lady's put out about something or other; and when I mentioned Mister Cyril's name accidental, she turned *cooloor de rose*."

"You're a fool, Collins; leave the room!" said the uncompromising old lady.

But as soon as the door was shut the French novel went down on the bed, and Lady Loughborough rang the bell twice. That meant, "Send up Justine."

Justine was a yellow-faced animal from Brussels, and was called "Ma'amselle." She and Collins were at daggers drawn.

"Tell Miss Ffrench to come here."

So poor Kate, who was sitting on the edge of her bed, dreaming with her eyes open, had to put on dressing-gown and slippers, and patter down the corridor to her aunt's chamber.

"Sit down, my dear," said Lady Loughborough. "Justine, put some coal on the fire, and bring up my negus."

"What is it, aunt?"

"Has Cyril asked you to marry him?"

"I—I—oh, aunt—well, he said—yes, he has asked me."

"And what did you say?"

"I didn't say anything."

"Oh! you accepted him then? Well, I'm very glad to hear it, my dear, though the news quite startled me."

Give me some water, my love. Not that tumbler, you little fool; that's my teeth! Thank you."

And the dowager, who had been termed by Rupert Dacre "a magnificent ruin," clattered her rings against the glass, and pretended to drink.

"Now, you can go," said she, when obedient Kate had smoothed the pillows; "and I shall speak to your uncle the first thing in the morning."

That was all; no love, nor kisses, nor tender words. Sybilla, Dowager Viscountess of Loughborough, regarded marriage as a mere affair of barter, and was glad that her niece had sold herself at a good price.

"It will be an excellent thing," she soliloquised. "Cyril will be kept out of mischief, and settle down; and Kate will have a home.—A little more sugar in the negus, Justine; you never make it sweet enough."

As she sipped her negus, she was so elated at the prospect of a speedy settlement of family embarrassments that she determined to write a note to Saville informing him of the fact, which she did.

"Let Mr. Chatteris have this the first thing to-morrow morning," said she, and then she read herself quietly to sleep with *La vie privée*, and dreamt that she was sixteen and dressing for her first ball.

Saville Chatteris was delighted of course, but he was also astonished. He had given up all hopes of a marriage between his son and his niece, and the intelligence startled him. Of course, the servants'-hall knew every particular, and Justine, as the *confidante* of Lady Loughborough, lied for at least three-quarters of an hour with astounding volubility.

"Cyril, I want to see you a moment," says his father, when Kate had risen to go—"Come into the library."

Cyril went, with his heart sinking into his boots, and all unconscious of the grinning faces of John and William, who interchanged smiles across the coffee-service.

"So, Cyril, you want to marry Kate, do you?"

"Yes, sir!" says Cyril.

"Ah. Well, my boy, I am very glad to hear it—very glad. It is just what I wished. It will keep you steady, and, I hope, make you a better man."

Cyril changed his foot.

"You know that I have always taken a very great interest in poor Laura's child"—he was dropping into his ordinary manner again—"and, as I told you on the occasion of our last interview, it has been the dearest wish of my heart to see her happily married. I did think at one time that she preferred poor Fred—but I was wrong, it seems"—The old man stopped suddenly—"Are you sure that this is not a passing infatuation—one of those follies which young men sometimes commit? I never suspected anything of the kind before."

"I have loved my cousin a long time," says Cyril, "but I did not like to speak to her. The fact was, sir, that, after my—after I left Oxford, I was ashamed of myself, and, in fact—"

"I understand, my boy," cries the father; his affection blinding his diplomatic eyes. "You wanted to atone for the past. Well, well, we'll say no more about it. I did not hear very good accounts of you from London, I must confess; but I suppose you were uneasy and anxious. Never mind. There, go and see Kate"—and, as he pushed his son gently out of the room, something very like a tear fell on to the old *diplomat's* waistcoat.

Cyril was quite overcome. He was not wholly bad, and this sudden display of undeserved affection was too much for him.

"What a villain I am!" was his first thought—"what a mess I've got into!" was the second—and selfishness carried the day. "I can manage somehow!" he cried mentally, as he walked down the passage. "Who knows what might happen?" and his half-formed thought of the previous night rose up grimly before him.

Kate was in the sunniest drawing-room in the house, pretending to read, and when her cousin came in, she rose to meet him.

"My aunt found it out last night, Cyril," said she.

"So I suppose," said he, and kissed her. There was a pause. "We shall have to wait a little," he said at length. "I must make arrangements for giving up my rooms in town. I suppose I shall have to live down here."

"No—you need not."

"My father wishes it, I believe."

"I think not," said Kate. "He was talking about you the other night, and seemed to think that you ought to do something—"

"Do what?"

"Go into parliament, I think he meant."

Cyril opened his eyes. Here was a chance he had not reckoned upon. Here was a vista of political fame opening before him.

"Go into parliament? I never thought of that. For Kirkminster I suppose?"

"Yes. I think he meant Kirkminster."

"But the Radicals are too strong."

"He seemed to think not."

"Well, perhaps it might be managed. How would you like to be the wife of a member of Parliament, Katy?" Kate blushed.

"You ought to do something, you know, Cyril; and uncle does not like the newspapers."

"No, I know he doesn't. I am tired of them too. Journalism is very unsatisfactory, Kate."

"But you might be a great author," said Kate, who, woman-like, was willing to believe her lover all that was brilliant and clever.

Cyril laughed; his vanity was gratified at the presumption.

"I might."

"I am sure you have talent enough. I should like you to be a great author!"

"Should you, darling? Well, I may be, one of these days."

"I am sure you will, if you will only work."

And they went off into a discussion upon authors, and novels, and literature.

Cyril forgot his troubles, and thought only of the woman at his side. She understood him. She was not like Carry, who always praised every book that her husband liked, merely because he did like it. With this woman his wife, he thought he might do something really great. He might settle down, and read, and work, and

talk over plans and projects. She could sympathise with him, for she was clever and well read; not like the silly girl he had left behind him. How he cursed himself for his hasty marriage! So the day passed, and Kate was happy. Yet even over her there seemed to hang some cloud as though thunder was in the air, and the present calm was but the lull before the storm.

Lady Loughborough appeared in the course of the afternoon, and was pleased to be gracious.

"I am very glad to hear of your engagement, Cyril," said she. "I am sure Kate will make you a good wife, and you will give up these horrid papers, and live like a gentleman. Society has claims upon you, Cyril, and you cannot ignore them." With which she pressed a kiss upon her niece's brow (the teeth being in their proper place) and composed herself upon a sofa with her grandest air.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PROSE AND POETRY.

BLAND was writing in his room when Binns came in, and flung himself upon a chair.

"I've seen her again, to-day," he cried. Bland knew whom he meant.

"Where?"

"In St. John's Wood. She was standing at the window of a house there, when I passed this afternoon. Oh, Bland, I'm in love with her yet!"

Bland looked up at the boy sadly.

"This is nonsense; you must forget her now."

"I can't, I can't," and he groaned.

Bland was silent.

"What am I to do, Bland?" cries poor Binns.

"It is no use to advise you, you won't take advice."

"Yes, I will. I have been working hard for months now; but the first time I saw her, all the old time came back again."

"What about this political business?"

"I met Dacre this afternoon just at the gate. I think he had been to call there."

Bland started. He had heard enough of Mr. Dacre to know that he was not the man to call upon a lady living in seclusion in St. John's Wood without some ulterior purpose in view.

"Did you speak to him?" he asked.

"No; I just passed him. He was lighting his cigar."

"At the gate?"

"Yes; he had just come out. He is a friend of Mr. Chatteris, you know."

"I don't like it," said Bland, shaking his head, mournfully.

"Like what?"

"Rupert Dacre visiting at that house."

Binns flushed.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he is not the man to be intimate with a young girl like that."

"She is pure as an angel," cries Binns.

"I hope so. But I have heard some queer stories about Mr. Dacre; he is not the 'model man' he appears to be."

"What have you heard?"

"Never mind. I hear many things which may or may not be true."

"You think then that Dacre is—is—making loving to Caroline?"

"Heaven forbid that I should say so, but it is quite probable."

"If I thought so, I would kill him," cries Binns, infuriate; and he rose and paced the room.

"Nonsense! Kill him! My dear Robert, you are too impulsive. Mr. Dacre is but an ordinary type of his class."

"He is an aristocrat, and I hate him!"

"Don't be foolish. Aristocrats, as you call them, are very good fellows. I knew many of them once. I daresay Mr. Dacre thinks he is not doing much harm."

"Much harm! To seduce another man's wife?"

"Perhaps he does not think that she is his wife?"

"But he must know it. Why, all the world knows it!"

"The world is a large place. Your world is not Mr. Dacre's world. It is easy to keep these things secret."

"But Cyril was married in open day at the church in Dym Street."

"Exactly; but all London does not go to the church in Dym Street. Who were present at the marriage?"

"I don't know; Mrs. Manton, I suppose."

"And then Mr. Chatteris went away, and when he returned he removed his wife to St. John's Wood. He is away now."

"Where?"

"Down at his father's house in Loamshire."

"How did you hear it?"

"I heard Blister say so; he is an intimate friend of his."

"The editor of the *Mercury*?"

"Yes. I am afraid that the poor girl has been deceived."

"Deceived! Impossible! He could not have deceived her."

"She lives with him under another name, at all events. He gave a letter to the messenger to post the other day, directed to Mrs. Carter, Laburnum Villas, St John's Wood. Is not that the house?"

Binns began to groan. He had heard and read of profligacy, but he had never seriously contemplated the fact of a man marrying a young girl, and deliberately endeavouring to falsify the marriage when he grew tired of her.

"He cannot be such a villain," he cried at last. "Oh, Carry, Carry, my love, my darling, they have deceived you! He does not care for you—he is a villain—a villain—a villain," and so on. You see he was much moved, this poetical young booby; and his sentiments found voice in invective.

"I will go to her at once, and find out about this matter. She shall not be injured. By heaven, if they try that, I'll—I'll—"

"Sit down, for goodness sake," cries poor Bland. "There, there, I am sorry I spoke. I may be wrong—I must be wrong."

Binns writhed away from the friendly hand.

"No, you are right. I believe you are right. That accounts for it all—for the secrecy and the mystery there has been about her. You remember the night that we were at Mrs. Manton's? That villain was there then. That was when he first spoke to me about politics. Curse his politics! Curse him, and everyone!—her, too! No, no—not her. She is a victim—a martyr!" and then he groaned again, and dug his fists into his eyes and blubbered.

Bland got up and lit his meerschaum,—that huge meerschaum, that had been his solace during many a weary night and day. The poor fellow's tender heart was sore, and as he sat and puffed, and the wreaths of smoke curled around his head, he thought of his own wife—that tender little blossom that had given herself so trustingly to the grim, gaunt, enthusiastic young man who wanted to be "an author," and who had, after much sorrow and toil, only succeeded in wrecking her frail little bark as well as his own among the cruel rocks and relentless billows of London life. "God help her, poor child!" he sighed.

Binns started up.

"Can we do nothing? Don't sit there like a block of stone, when, perhaps—Oh, Bland, you don't care for me, or you would help me!"

Bland turned sorrowful eyes upon him.

"Don't say that, my dear boy," he said. "You know I do care for you. But we can do nothing now."

"Why did you not tell me at first?"

"I did not know of it until yesterday—at least I only suspected. I only suspect now."

"We had better tell her mother."

"I thought of that; but the result would only be that the poor child would be taken somewhere else."

"Then write to his father and tell him that his son is married."

"That might do, but—No, I think that the best thing is to wait and watch. She is a good girl, I believe——"

"I *know* she is."

"—And, perhaps, after all, Dacre is really a friend of

her's. I think that the best plan will be, to give Mrs. Manton an inkling that Dacre is too frequently at the house, and for us to watch him. Cannot you renew your acquaintance with her?"

"Oh, I can't see her again! Bland, I can't—I daren't."

"You must! Come, be a man! Do not let this hopeless passion unfit you for a man's work. Besides," says Bland, a touch of gentle sarcasm in his tone, "you are young—you will forget her—"

"Never," cries Binns—"Never! I have tried, and failed. I shall always love her."

"You love her now because you can't get her—because she is unhappy and in sorrow; but you will see other women you will like better, by and by."

"Don't talk like that, Bland! I can't bear it! I know I'm ugly and ill-bred, and only half educated, but I know what love means. I can neither write, nor read, nor sleep because of her. It is only when I have work to do that must be done, that I can forget her. I did forget her for a little time, but when I saw her again I was as bad as ever. Oh, Bland, it's terrible! If I take up a book and see her name in it, I tremble. If I hear her spoken of, I blush. I *am* a fool, I know, but I can't help it—boo-hoo—I—I—can't h-help it!"

"Poor fellow!"

"It is all very well to say 'forget her!' I am a 'cad' I know, but I've got feelings. She's too good for me, and she's too good for him. Oh, why was I born?"

Bland could not but smile, but his face was in the shadow. Binns went on—

"Look here!—if she'd married me, I'd have made her happy. I'd have worked for her and loved her, and been an honest and true husband to her. But she wouldn't! No, she was taken in by that 'curled and oiled Assyrian bull,' that scented mass of millinery; and she's thrown herself away, and made my life miserable. I'll go away to Australia, or somewhere. I can't live in the same country with her. Oh, Carry, Carry!"

Bland, whose capricious fancy was tickled at the notion of Cyril being like a curled and oiled bull of any breed, Assyrian or otherwise, was smiling, but the last sentence

was uttered in so dismal a tone, that his heart smote him for his selfishness.

"Robert—my dear Robert—do not go on like this. You make me miserable."

Binns sprang up again.

"All right, my dear fellow—all right. I *will* forget her! I'll work and write and talk. I'll go to this Dacre, and see what he can do for me. I'll watch him, and her, and all of them. I'll save her; and then, when she knows how much I love her, I'll go away, and she shall never see me more."

Then he began to sing: "Shall I, wasting in despair, die, because a woman's fair? If she be not fair for me, what care I—?"

But he broke down.

"Oh! my God, what shall I do? This is killing me!"

And he rushed off into his room.

Bland took up the meerschaum again with a sigh.

"Poor young fellow, he's going through the fire! He does love the girl, I believe, but he's very young. He'll 'get over it,' as men say. Ah, well, this is a weary world; 'out of joint,' as Hamlet says. She is not half good enough for him, and yet he is dying for her. He sobs and sighs and makes his life miserable, and she is probably trying on a new bonnet, or fitting a new bracelet. Yet I don't know. Perhaps I am wrong, and the poor child is really unhappy. I am sure Dacre is at some villany, and she is romantic and silly. That comes of educating girls above their stations, or, rather, of not educating them enough. Half-measures are always bad. That was the mistake I made—neither author nor plagiarist. I was hopeful and young once, like *him*; but I failed. My own fault, I suppose, 'like little wanton boys that swim on bladders.' Heigho! I married young—married for love—and my darling died. Better so, perhaps! I am old, and grey, and careworn, but the grass on *her* grave is always green. Life is very wearisome! A mistake? I don't know; I begin to doubt everything sometimes. Faith—faith—you can move mountains! Ah! it is a sad farce to most of us; tears and laughter mixed—dead-sea fruit. I don't know; there is something noble

in living, in working—something not wholly vulgar in dying with the consciousness that one has done even such work as God has given me to do. What will be the end of it all, I wonder? Dust and ashes? Shall I be put between four boards and annihilated for ever—turned into phosphates and guano—or shall I get my sins pardoned, and see her again with her pure eyes, an angel in heaven? All is dark—dark and dreary; ‘infants crying for the light; and with no language but a cry.’” He looked round the room. “This cannot be the end of it—a coffin in one corner, and the blinds down for a day; then phosphates! Lord help us all!”

And then the poor old bewildered man knelt down and prayed; and, in the middle of his prayers, the landlady knocked at the door to tell him that she wouldn’t have the gas burnt at that rate, and that if he wanted to sit up late he must buy candles for himself.

The sublime and the ridiculous side by side.

He went into Binns’ room. The boy was asleep—not poetically, but with his mouth open. The little table in the corner was loaded with papers. Poetry.

Bland turned the heap over.

That glorious vision that old Homer had,
What time the sound of battle came to him
Over the wind-swept plains of Troy.

“Hum! plagiarism! Tennyson. What’s this?”

TO LONGFELLOW’S HYPERION.

Oh! dreamy book, read long ago
In quiet childhood—half forgotten,
Thy memory breathes full soft and low.

“Of course! We have all heard that idea before. Here is something about the sea.”

In the long stillness of the moonless nights,
When with a ghastly glimmer,
Shuddering break the Northern lights,
And the blue ice doth shimmer

With a treacherous, ghostly gleam,
And the sheeted icebergs floating along—

“What is a ‘sheeted iceberg?’”

TO C——.

I wait for thee, my love,
When daylight fades, and stars are nigh.

“To rhyme with ‘sky,’ I suppose? Of course!”

TO BEATRICE.

“Who’s she, I wonder?”

O’er hill and valley the sun has set,
Beatrice;
But in yonder garden where last we met
The tender twilight lingers yet,
Beatrice!
The roses wax faint with their own perfume.

“Do they?—Ah! he’s been reading Tom Moore, I see.”

Should worldly cares or griefs my heart be fretting,
Then turn thy dewy lips to mine.
With each delirious kiss a grief forgetting,
I’ll drown my cares in Love and Wine!

“Love and Wine! Poor fellow! More blank verse!”

The blushes shuddered o’er her face as fast
As shadowed clouds upon a hill at noon.

“That’s nonsense! Ah! here’s an idea!”

A mighty Presence, with unwinking eyes,
That looks on an eternity of stars.

“Not so bad that! Here’s some prose! ‘The Glory of Labour: an Essay on Working Men’s Associations.’ The ink hardly black yet.”

He shaded the candle with his hand, and turned and looked at the sleeper.

"You've got some stuff in you, I believe, my poor boy; but it is hard work getting it out—isn't it? In the meantime, we must see how we can help this poor little girl. If I hear anything more about Mr. Dacre, I shall see Chatteris myself."

And he went to bed shaking his grizzled head sorrowfully.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEARING THE BRINK.

CYRIL had been away three weeks. He could not instantly go back home, and so he wrote a letter to his wife, telling her that his father was anxious for him to stop, and he was afraid that if he hurried his departure he should offend him. The letter concluded with a "God bless you," and contained a ten-pound note.

Carry pouted at the smallness of the sum. She had begun to be extravagant. She had begun to order new dresses, and fresh jewellery. This was a bad sign. Moreover, she always wore her new purchases in the afternoons when Mr. Dacre called. So she let the ten-pound note flutter contemptuously to the floor, and threw the letter into the fire.

"Only ten pounds," she said, "and Madame Fouchet has called three times for her money!" Then a momentary pang smote her, and she snatched the letter from the coals. "Perhaps he cannot afford more. Poor Cyril!" and she picked up the note and sighed.

Cyril could not afford more. He was not very extravagant; but chambers in the Albany, two clubs, and a "separate establishment" in St. John's Wood, cost money. In point of fact, he was nearly at the end of his tether, and intended to make his engagement to his cousin an excuse for asking for more money. He would not return to town yet. Carry was well enough alone, and he could not leave his cousin. Dacre sent him a letter brimful

of anecdote and scandal, but advising him not to come up yet. "Nothing to do—nothing to see—I am bored to death."

So far so good; he was happy in the present, and cared not to look beyond. "Carry can go to her mother if she feels dull," he said, and thought no more about the matter.

But Carry did not feel dull. She had a daily visitor—Mr. Rupert Dacre.

That gentleman, having once gained admittance under the title of *l'ami du maison*, had given up all mention of Cyril's supposed iniquity. He said that he had been deceived, and that Cyril was merely amusing himself. "He must find town dull, you know—he has been used to go into society so much."

This view of the case was not more pleasant for Carry than the other one. She did not like to be deserted by her husband for another woman; but to desert her because he was "dull" was not the less painful to talk of. She was very sorrowful at first, and cried, and sobbed, and vowed vengeance; then Dacre soothed her, and her vanity would not let her admit that there was a possibility of her husband leaving her because he loved another.

Mr. Dacre was kind and attentive, and praised her singing and her playing, and was everything that Cyril ought to have been. Carry had taken it into her silly head that she was a "*femme incomprise*," that she was not understood. She was right to a certain extent. That she could not understand her husband's cynicism and wit, and did not care for the books he cared for, she admitted; but, on the other hand, he did not appreciate her wealth of sentiment and love, and wounded her tender little heart twenty times a day by exhibitions of his own selfishness.

She loved him still, but her love was injured and hurt. Mr. Dacre was so good, and kind, and courteous that her first fear of him had worn off, and she regarded him as a friend. Dangerous friendship! She did not love him; she liked him. He pleased her. It flattered her vanity to think that such a great man as the private secretary of Lord Nantwich appeared to be, should take more pleasure in her society than in that of the numerous duchesses and marchionesses with whom she supposed him to be intimate.

So she dressed to please him, and talked her best, and looked her best, and sang her best for him. She was a different creature in his presence. Neglect kills women.

When Cyril was yawning over a book, or talking borrowed cynicism which she did not understand, she was silent, weary, and *distracte*. When Dacre was with her, she was lively, *piquante*, witty even. Her nature expanded under the genial sun of Rupert's delicate flattery, and she became a different woman. She was appreciated, she thought, and so she looked her best, not her worst. But still she did not love Dacre, and he knew it. Any feeling of the kind that arose in her heart was instantly banished. She meant no harm. Sometimes she thought that she ought to send him away, or tell her husband; but then he was so polite and deferential, and sympathy was so sweet. So she dallied on the brink of destruction, and there was no warning voice to tell her of her danger.

In the meantime Mr. Dacre pursued his usual avocations. He had much on his hands, but he was still outwardly calm, languid, and impassive. He had the happy faculty of being able to devote himself to the moment. He could always concentrate his ideas upon the immediate matter in hand, and when Lord Nantwich talked politics, or dictated official memoranda, he never found his secretary the less attentive, or clear sighted: for all that unread letters from creditors, mistress, or friend, were lying on the table before him. "A time for all things," was Dacre's motto, and he could banish all unpleasant thoughts until "a more convenient season." When in the office, he was the secretary upon whose shoulders rested all the business of "Foreign Affairs"; when in the green-room, or his stall at the opera, he was the bland, well-informed, influential critic; when in the smoking room of the club, the cynical commentator on men and manners, or the good fellow who would lose at billiards, or win at *écarté* with the same easy grace, and unruffled demeanour—it was only when he was alone that the spectres of debt, duns, intrigue, and difficulty arose before him.

The pleasant boobies who nodded so carelessly to Rupert, as he passed them in the "Row," thought that he was the easiest-going, most ordinary fellow alive, and

the *beaux sabreurs*, whose credit at their Agents was not so good as heretofore, sighed as they heard his soft laugh, and watched his calm and placid bearing. "Careful fellow, Dacre!" was the comment of the gilded youths of fashion,—*"Lives his life so easily!"* But could they have known all the thoughts that passed behind that smooth white brow, they would not have envied him his fortune. At present he was—he confessed it—"in a deeper hole than ever." As he mounted his horse for his accustomed "constitutional" on this particular afternoon, he felt that his outward demeanour was not so gay as of yore.

"If Nantwich fails in this business," he muttered, "I am ruined—bills innumerable unpaid, fortune and fame staked at one throw. I have been a fool. I who thought myself so wise. I have had too many irons in the fire, and if I don't take care I shall burn my fingers. The tide of bill discounting must ebb one of these days, and then I shall be left high and dry upon the shore—stranded. This Chatteris affair is foolish—what can I do with the woman if I get her? I *will* get her, though; so that does not matter. If Calverly 'breaks,' I suppose Ryle will come upon me, and if he does—crash! No fear of that though—at least I hope not. At all events I have made myself as safe as I can. If the Cardinal wins, Bob will be in funds; and if he loses—as he most probably will—I shall win enough to put me straight with Jewry. If Nantwich forms a party, I shall be provided for; and if he doesn't—well, I suppose something will turn up. I won't give in without a struggle. It would be hard if I were beaten, after all my scheming. I won't think of it. One might manage to squeeze some money out of Master Cyril," and he laughed pleasantly. "Poor Cyril! Bah, what asses men make of themselves. Yet I don't know; the love of a pure and virtuous woman is worth having—so romancers say. Perhaps it is—but then the difficulty is to find the woman—nowadays one believes in nobody but one's own mother. Cynical philosophy!—wrong, too, I dare say. Ah me! virtue is best, I believe, after all—sin becomes so stupid after a little time.

We say of love—what is it?
Of virtue—we but miss it,
Of sin—we do but kiss it,
And it's no longer sin.

Kiss it!—Bah, the paint comes off. When I am rich I will be good; anybody can be righteous on ten thousand a year. *Vogue la galère.*" And as he reached the now desolate ladies' mile, he put his horse into a canter and, *Atra Cura*, found the motion disagreeable, and dropped behind.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

ON his return to Brook Street he found Calverly stretched upon the sofa listlessly turning over a sporting magazine. The young man was frequently there now. Having made a confidant, he was eternally confiding. This was rather a nuisance to Dacre, who did not care about confidences. He was cordial enough though.

"Hallo, Bob! How are you? Come to dinner? That's right! I saw Ponsonby in town to-day, and should not be surprised if he dropped in. Nobody at the clubs—London as dull as ditch water. I've a great mind to go away; only Nantwich is in such a state of anxiety about the Government that I scarcely like to ask him.—Harris, take some hot water to my dressing room, and let us have dinner in half-an-hour.—And how have you been, old fellow? Have a glass of sherry before feeding time?"

Bob said he would. He drank a good many "sherries" before dinner now.

"By Jove, my boy, what have you been doing? Your hand shakes awfully."

"It's nothing. I was out late last night."

"You are always out late now. You *must* take care, my dear boy! Why, you're looking quite ill!"

"Don't mind my looks!" cries Bob, a little pettishly. "Go and dress, old fellow," and then he buried himself in his magazine.

As Dacre shut the door, he heard the clink of glasses, and when he came back, the decanter was half empty.

He said nothing, however, and was more affable at dinner than usual. "There is something on the fellow's mind," he said, "and I'll have it out of him before the evening's over."

Half-way through the first cigar he spoke:

"Why so silent, O *Robert* that I love? Prithee, why so pale, fond lover? prithee, why so pale?"

"I'm not pale."

"Then is your state the more gracious. I thought you were. Come, Bob, what is the matter?"

"I'm a fool!" said Bob, bitterly.

"Your case is not singular; most men are."

"Oh, don't chaff, Dacre; I'm not in the humour for it."

"You wear *your* rue with a difference. Other men have been in love besides you."

Bob blushed. "I suppose they have."

"And got over it, as you will."

"No, I never will!"

"Dissipation will soon cure you."

"I've tried it."

"Gambling?"

"Yes—that was better!"

"The only cure. Double-sixes are better than double-harness, and the Queen of Beauty pales before the Queen of Trumps. I'd rather hold four by honours than kiss the prettiest woman in Christendom!"

"It doesn't last though."

"What—the kissing?"

"No; the play. One forgets for a time only to remember more bitterly."

"Quite poetical! 'I dream of thee, sweet Madoline!' Eat pork chop for supper, and then you won't."

"You don't understand me, Dacre."

"Don't I? Oh, yes I do. You feel a silent sorrow here—don't you? An uneasy sensation about the fourth button of the waistcoat—a tendency to be miserable—a restlessness, like the white bears at the Zoo! Poor Robert! Have another cigar? *Vive l'amour! sigars and cognac!* I prefer the cigars—and cognac."

"That is French sentiment."

"Like the cognac! Perhaps it is! I hate your British brands!"

Bob lit another Cabana. "I wish you'd be serious, Dacre."

"Serious! My dear boy, the great end and aim of my life is to avoid being serious. I make Harris read the police reports to me while I dress, to avoid thinking."

"The police reports?"

"Yes; they always make me laugh. Fancy a poor devil being sentenced to three years' hard labour for stealing a pair of breeches, while Justice goes in the evening to see a sensation drama, where the plot is stolen from one author, the dialogue from another, and the 'situations' from a third, the whole being 'vamped up' by some unhappy young man who never gets paid because the manager turns insolvent."

"That is nonsense, Dacre."

Dacre laughed. "Of course it is; I wanted to say something smart, that is all. *Fungaris vice cotis*. You are my hone—I sharpen my wit upon you. Don't you think, now, Bob, that I am a very clever fellow?"

Bob smiled. "I wish you'd show me a way out of my scrape."

"What is it?"

"Well, just this. I've lost money at play; I'm in love, and I'm in debt."

"Is that all? You've been in that state for some time."

"Well, no; it is not all. The fact is, that that horse of mine—I've been backing him heavily, Dacre."

"So people say."

"And if he loses I shall be ruined."

"No, you won't. Men are never ruined at three and twenty."

"I've got more than seven thousand pounds on him."

Dacre *did* start this time.

"Seven thousand! What on earth have you been thinking of?"

"It is a great deal of money; and it makes me anxious."

"My dear boy, it's madness!"

"I believe in the horse, you know."

"Well, but—" Dacre was about to give vent to his own private opinion concerning Lord Lundyfoot's favourite, and then recollecting that he himself had been instrumental in the purchase, changed his tone. "Of course he's a good horse—better than people think—but it is such a risk!"

"Nothing venture nothing win!" cries Bob, laughing a little discordantly.

"Can't you hedge?"

"Of course; but I won't. Not a shilling! Look here, Dacre. I'm getting reckless. I'll stay here until the summer, and then I'll go back to Australia. I had thought about it before, and I've made up my mind now. I'm in love with that girl, and I *must* forget her. Dissipation won't do; this life is killing me; a man must be of some good in the world. I'll go back to Australia and try if the bush will cure me."

"Either cure or kill you. Why, you've got nothing to do up there!" says Dacre, who did not like to lose so profitable a friend.

"There's always work there. I can go up to new country."

"Oh!

'I will wed some savage woman!
She shall rear my dusky race!'

"Is that the programme? Don't be an ass, Bob. You haven't lost the girl yet."

"Yes, I have; she's in love with Chatteris."

"I told you before, my dear boy, that she will never marry him."

"Why not?"

"Family reasons. If you are a sensible man, you will go down to Loamshire now, and see her again."

"*He's* there."

"Well, no harm in that. Is he not the 'young hopeful' of the house of Chatteris—the returned prodigal, for whom the fatted calf was killed? Of course he's there!"

"I say, Dacre," says Bob, raising himself on his elbow, "what was the matter with Cyril Chatteris? There was some story about his leaving Oxford."

"Oh, some youthful peccadillo, I suppose. I never

thoroughly understood the rights of the case myself. Some fellows said it was a woman, others a dun, others a college scrape. Who knows?"

"I heard something about a family difficulty. You know I never liked the fellow much, myself. He's not my style."

Dacre surveyed the prostrate form of his friend.

"No—I don't suppose he is. Cyril Chatteris is a Quietist."

"A what?"

"A Quietist. A man who adopts the *nil admirari* motto, and models himself upon Alcibiades. You've heard of *him*, I suppose?"

"The Greek fellow who broke statues?" says Bob, whose recollections of classic lore were somewhat hazy.

"Precisely—and did some other things worth mention. A Grecian Lord Wharton; the George Villiers of the Acropolis. Not a bad fellow in his way—but foolish. That Persian business was a mistake. He should have been the private secretary of Pharnabazus. Instead of which he got himself shot. The worst use they could put him to."

"I don't understand you."

Dacre laughed. "Well, *revenons à nos moutons*—to return to Cyril. He copies the Greek fellow who broke the statues; that is, as far as he can. It is a weakness of young men of the day. They want to know everything, without the trouble of learning it, to have done everything without the trouble of doing it, and to be at twenty-five what other men were content to think of at fifty. Alcibiades was not democratic enough. He outraged prejudices—a fatal mistake—and his imitators possess all his faults, without any of his virtues. 'Earnestness' is the popular cant now, and the *dolce far niente* business doesn't go down. Cyril Chatteris will go to the bad one of these days."

"I hope not."

"Good boy! So do I, of course. Is he not my familiar friend? But he will. He has got no ballast; and boats without ballast are not safe craft to sail in. Make your mind easy about *him*."

"I don't wish him any harm; but I—I—"

"You are in love with Miss Ffrench."

"Yes—I am."

"Well, anything I can do for you, you know, I will do."

"I know you will, old fellow," cries Bob, grasping the white hand which Dacre extended to him. "Let us drop the subject. Come down to-morrow with me, and see the 'Cardinal.' I daresay we shall 'pull off' yet."

"Hope you will, my boy; but don't be too rash. It's long odds against you, remember."

"Yes, in both cases."

"What is the motto? 'Advance Australia,' isn't it? Don't be down-hearted. Come up here in the morning, and we'll go down and see the horse. Good night!"

* * * * *

"Poor Bob!" said Dacre, as he flung himself back in his chair when his friend had departed. "If he only knew as much as I do about Cyril Chatteris and his belongings! I wonder if it would be worth while telling him? I think not. Upon my word I've a great mind to run a 'dark horse,' and marry Miss Kate myself."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MAJOR GETS A LITTLE "INFORMATION."

A GREY morning, cold and drizzly. The trees by the roadside looked haggard and unkempt—as though they had been up all night, and did not feel any the better for it. The clouds were low in the sky, and hung sulkily about the hedge-rows and bushes; even the wind appeared to have arisen in a bad humour, for it moaned and groaned, and indulged in little sniffs and gusts and fretful puffings, as though it had not quite made up its mind on the subject of blowing. It was not the sort of morning to entice a lazy man from his bed, and the "pike-keeper," on the west road, grumbled as he swung back the heavy white gates, to permit the four-in-hand drag to pass.

The six men who sat behind Mr. Calverly's four greys, appeared to care little about weather. Swathed in the

thickest of great coats, and smoking the thickest of cigars, Jack Ponsonby defied the world. The little Major was in the highest of spirits. He had come up to town on a visit to his agents—which visit had produced satisfactory results, and meeting Welterwate and Pierrepont at an advanced hour in the morning, had heard of the approaching trial, and in order to be present at it sat up and played whist with Miniver and two men in the Blues. It being his boast, however, that he was always in "training," he scorned to show any symptoms of weariness, and assuming a preternatural liveliness, drove Welterwate to the verge of ill humour by repeatedly accusing him of somnolence.

"What sleepy beggars you are!" cried the Honourable John. "Why, you are half asleep now, Welter! Why don't you go in for exercise, and that sort of thing? Look at me! Hard as iron, sir! Ride for my life to-morrow! You are all killing yourselves, you young men. There's Algy nodding like a mandarin, and even Dacre looks sulky."

"I was up rather late last night," says Dacre. "It is all very well for you idle fellows, but poor men like me must work, you know. There's that business of Nantwich bothering me."

"Rupert always affects a preposterous amount of work," said Algy Pierrepont, who was not quite deficient in comprehension.

"Ah, you fellows don't know what hard work means."

"What do you call 'early parade?'" grumbled Welterwate.

"Early parade!" cries the Major, contemptuously; "listen to that from a 'defender of his country!' There will be no muscle at all in England shortly, I verily believe."

"We'll send it all to Australia, eh, Bob?"

Bob smiled dimly, but did not reply. They had reached Thames Ditton by this time, and to his anxiety about the Cardinal, was added the task of keeping the four greys successfully in the middle of the straggling narrow street.

"Poor Bob! The cares of horseflesh are upon him! See how grim he looks!"

"Oh, that mine enemy would buy a racehorse!" says Dacre.

"Don't laugh," returned Bob. "The race hasn't been run yet. We'll see how the nag looks this morning."

"There they are!" cried Ponsonby, whose sharp eyes had espied a group of black objects clustered under the lee of the low stabling that ran at the back of Mr. Docketer's house. "We shall see them again at the turn of the road."

"We must be late," said Bob; "and as I didn't tell Docketer that I was coming, he may start without us. St-t-t! Go on, lads!"

The group at the stables consisted of four persons. Mr. Docketer—whose attire seemed to consist principally of great coat and corduroys—little Jemmy Seabright the jockey, Isaac the weazened groom, and no less a personage than Mr. Charles Ryle himself.

Notwithstanding the early hour, Mr. Ryle was faultlessly dressed. His thick overcoat was creaseless, his boots were spotless, his dog-skin gloves apparently just put on, and his face ruddy and shining with good health. Although he had driven the longbacked trotting mare twelve miles before his hurried breakfast with Docketer, he looked as though it was twelve o'clock on High Change, and he was going to complete a bargain which would put £10,000 into his pocket. Docketer was leaning against the half-door of the loose box, chewing his customary straw, and little Jemmy Seabright stood reverentially by the side of Isaac, who was in charge of the sheeted form of the renowned Cardinal.

"A minute and a half, Docketer!" says Ryle. "Are you sure?"

"Quite, sir," returned that honest fellow. "It started me; it did, I can tell you; but there, you câ-ant tell wot's in a 'oss. It's disgustin', I call it."

"Disgusting?" says Ryle, with something very like an oath. "I won't believe it unless I see it with my own eyes."

"Well, you can easily do that. Jim, go and get out Boadicea, and look sharp about it."

"How came you never to find it out before, you fool?" asks Ryle.

"Blessed if I know!" says Docketer, savagely taking in more straw. "It came all of a sudden like. The mare she was a doin' her best, when the boy gives the old bullock a cut with the whip and yells out at him and he jest slipped past her like anythink! I know I never could get no go out of him when I had him; but that lad was brought up in old Snuff-box's stable, and knows how to work him, I suppose."

"Old Snuff-box" was the nickname by which Ronald, sixth Earl of Lundyfoot, Marquess of Mull and Cantire, Baron Rappee in Ireland, and feudal lord over the broad moors of Strathsneezin, was known on the democratic Turf. Ryle whistled.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Well, we must do the best we can. Do you think the brute can win?"

"No, I don't say that, Muster Ryle, but his chance ain't half so bad as we thort it were."

Ryle ran his eye over the tremendous quarters of the big horse as Isaac tenderly tightened the surcingle under the clothes and prepared to hoist the lad to his saddle.

"Come here, Seabright! you've ridden this horse before, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir," says the lad, "I rode him at the only time he won a race."

"Ah! I remember. Yes, astonished everybody. How was it he never won anything else, eh?"

"Don't know, sir; unless it was that they didn't know how to handle him. You see, sir, I'd been with him ever since he was foaled a'most, and the horse 'knows me.'"

"Why didn't you ride again, then?" put in Docketer, "Got a bad fall, larkin', sir, and got the sack for throwing down a hoss."

"Oh; sarve yer right, yer young scamp!"

"Well, sur, I don't say but what it did; but I wor very bad, I wor; hurt my back, somehow. In fact, if Major Ponsonby hadn't given me a little light work about his stable, I should ha' starved, I expect."

"Um!" says Ryle. "Well, you do as you're told, and you won't starve here. Get up and give the horse a spin now with the mare."

"There's horses' feet on the road!" says Docketer.

"Bless'd if it ain't Mr. Calverly and a lot of swells in a fower-in-'and! Confound it, we can't run 'em this morning then."

"Here, I won't be seen about. I'll just slip round by the back of the house. Don't you tell him, Docketer."

"All right," says the Man, who could be trusted with untold gold; "I won't tell him, Muster Ryle."

In another moment the ringing of the gate bell, and the clashing of gravel, announced the arrival of the visitors.

"Hold on a bit, Isaac," says Docketer; "we'll have to wait now, I suppose. And you, you young beggar," he added, turning to the lad, "none o' your yellings this mornin', mind. You take it easy, and never mind if Boadicea beats yer on the post. Do yer understand."

Jemmy grinned. To a boy who was born at Newmarket and bred in a racing stable, such a question was superfluous.

"Good mornin', gentlemen, good mornin'. Didn't expect you this morning', Mr. Calverly. How do you do, Mr. Dacre?"

"Well, Docketer, how is the world with you?" said Ponsonby, who boasted that he knew everybody who had ever owned a racehorse.

"Oh, sur, I can't complain. Trade's pretty good, and ground's pretty soft."

"How is the horse?" asked Bob.

"Fit as a fiddle, sur. Walk him over here, my lad!" The boy obeyed, and, when he saw Ponsonby, seemed inclined to speak, but, catching the Major's impassible eye, and seeing no recognition there, contented himself with jerking his head at Bob.

"Who's this, Docketer?" said Bob.

"He's a new lad, Muster Calverly. T'other one couldn't be trusted. This 'ere boy is smart enough, and knows his work, so I hengaged him. Don't yer saw his mouth, yer young vagabond. Woho, boy, then! Steady! Feel his legs, Major. Hiron, ain't 'em? I'm a going to give him a spin with Boadicea this mornin'."

"Well, you'd better look sharp," says Welterwate, "it's six o'clock now."

"Get up, Isaac, then, and take 'em twice round."

Both the horses seemed pretty well matched. The

mare kept close alongside the Cardinal for all his tremendous strides, and, as they went past the little group of spectators for the first time, the Major said,

"He's an awfully slow mover, Docketer; those strides of his are tremendous, but he takes half-an-hour to do 'em in."

"Bless you, Major Ponsonby, he's only a playin' now; see him by an' by, when the lad lets him out."

"He looks as if he could 'stay,'" says Pierrepont.

"Stay! Yes, till the day after to-morrow," returned Docketer, a little contemptuously.

"Now they're letting 'em out. See! By Jove, he brings his legs under him well, though. The mare can move along, too."

"Once more, and then run for it!" shouted Docketer, as the two horses dashed past.

They were close together still, but, at last, Boadicea began to draw ahead, and improved her distance with every stride.

"It's very strange," said Bob. "I never saw her beat him before."

"He's coming up, now, though," cried Dacre. "Good! By Jove, there's pace enough." The boy was standing in his stirrups, and with the Cardinal well in hand, was coming up every moment. Old Isaac and the mare, however, were not to be beaten. The big horse passed them once, and Bob's heart began to beat quicker, but, despise all apparent struggling, Boadicea gained by inches, and finally passed the white post, against which Docketer leant, a good half length before the "crack" that was to retrieve the young Australian's fortunes.

Bob dashed his glass to the ground.

"He *can't* be fit, Docketer," he cried.

"He gives two stone you know, Mister Calverly, and he's a orful 'oss to keep in condition. Blessed if I know what to do with him. Now, yesterday, for eggssample, he went like clockwork."

Ponsonby had been looking attentively at the "boy," who having dismounted, was leading the horse to and fro. He lounged toward the pair.

"I've seen you ride before somewhere," he said.

Master James Seabright looked askance.

"Don't you remember Jemmy Seabright, who you took in down at Leamington, sir, when the —th were quartered there?"

"Oh!" said the Major—"Yes, I do. Now look here, my lad," and he glanced back at the group, "tell me why you didn't pass the mare."

Jem shifted his feet. "I couldn't," he said.

"Oh yes, you could, but you wouldn't."

"'Pon my sivvy, I couldn't; there!" cries the boy with sudden energy. "I did what I knew, Major, s'elp me; but she's werry quick on her feet is that mare, and it ain't no good with the weight I carry."

The Honourable John looked hard at the shifting blue eyes of the jockey, but could read nothing there.

"You are an ungrateful little hound," he said, "and a little liar into the bargain. I saw you pull that horse distinctly, as you turned by the white gate."

Jem flushed, and seemed about to reply, but Docketer, ever watchful, stepped up and invited the Major to come and "'ave a snack," which effectually prevented any further conversation.

During breakfast poor Bob was rather cast down, and his spirits were not raised by the wisdom which circulated around him.

"I always told you, old fellow, that the horse was not the flyer you took him for," says Welterwate, eager to be also among the prophets.

"I hope you have not got *very* much on him," says the sympathising Pierrepont, who had himself given fifteen to one (or five points below the market price) the day before.

"You *have* been 'plunging' a little, Bob, I believe," said Dacre, who was breakfasting with his usual equanimity. "Now, the best thing you can do is to hedge for your life when you go back to town."

Bob looked moody. He was terribly disappointed; for, despite Mr. Docketer's pleasant allusions to weight and condition, he saw, or thought he saw, that the horse had been easily beaten, and fairly ridden. As I have said, Robert Calverly prided himself upon his knowledge of horses and horse-flesh, and it went sorely to his heart

to confess that he had made a mistake. He had half a mind to throw up the whole thing, scratch the horse, and "retire from the turf." He had not quite decided, however, when a shock-headed animal, who was half stable-helper, half body-servant, announced that the "drag was waitin'."

"Good-bye, Docketer," says Bob, as the party went out "I'll send you a note in a day or two, and tell you what to do with the horse. I am afraid that it is not much use letting him start."

This did not suit Mr. Docketer's "book" at all.

"Not let him start, Muster Calverly! You're joking. Why, we've got all our money on him. The 'oss ain't up to his work now,—but he do take a lot of trainin', he do. He'll be right enough come next month, sur—trust me."

"Well," said Bob, "if he don't get better, I shan't let him start," and he turned away.

Meanwhile the party had established themselves comfortably in their seats, and looked round for Bob.

"What's keeping the fellow, I wonder," said the Major, somewhat sulkily. He had been out of temper all the morning.

As he spoke he felt something pull the skirt of his coat, and looking down, saw the slender form of "the boy."

Master James Seabright had mounted upon the high wheel of the phaeton, and putting his cunning little face close to Ponsonby's coat collar, delivered himself hurriedly as follows:

"Beg parding, sur, but hearin' inside as how you had money on it, sur, and remembering wot a kind friend you'd been to me, I jist slipped round to tell you. You're right, sur, about the pulling. I rode to orders this morning, and let the mare beat me. It's all right, sur. You tell Mr. Calverly to keep his spirits up. If I ride the Cardinal, Major Ponsonby, I'll win with him if they only gives me fair play."

After which he nodded twice to the Honourable, who was somewhat astonished at the sudden apparition, and seeing Mr. Docketer emerge from the low doorway of his cottage, jumped from the wheel and was lost to view.

Ponsonby said nothing until they reached Long's, and

then, as he shook Bob's hand at parting, he said, "Don't you be afraid about your horse, old fellow. I didn't say anything before those fellows—but he was pulled this morning; the boy told me so. Docketer is trying to work one of his 'little games,' I expect—and we must watch him. You put your money on, old fellow. If you haven't got a flyer, you've got a horse that's worth a lot more than people think."

"How did you find out about Docketer?" asked Bob breathlessly.

"Can't stop to tell you now. Come and dine with me to-night at the 'Rag,' and we'll hold council over the matter."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LOSING GAME.

BINNS determined to watch over the fortunes of his adored. He was torn with love, distracted with agony of anxiety. Did she really love her husband, or was she inclining to the flatteries of Dacre? Much as poor Binns detested his successful rival, he would, he said to himself, have been contented had he been sure that the woman he loved was happy. Of course he would not have been, but, in the present state of things, he deluded himself into that belief.

Bland advised him to go and see Carry again, but the poor fellow was afraid.

"I daren't," he said; and perhaps he was wise.

"Love in absence" is a pretty song, but the sentiment is not always applicable, and Binns thought that the sight of his love would only feed the flame that consumed him. Nevertheless, in his spare moments, he walked round about St. John's Wood with great pertinacity. He leant against lamp-posts and gazed up at windows; he prowled about gardens—Romeo fashion—and quoted poetry to the moon with desperate energy. Yet, notwithstanding all this apparent absurdity, he was practical enough. He had determined upon his course of action. He would

watch and wait, and if he thought that his suspicions were well founded, he would tell Mrs. Manton of her daughter's danger. As yet he could fix upon no special incident as a pretext for such a proceeding.

Dacre was frequently at the house, it was true, but he came in the afternoons, and left at five or six o'clock. Carry went out for walks, but always returned before dusk. Binns began to think that he had been too hasty in his conclusions.

The fact was that the cautious Rupert was too wise to force the game. Cyril was away, and he had the field to himself. There was no hurry. Besides, the bird was timid, and trembled at the net.

"It would never do to frighten her," thought Dacre. "I nearly made that mistake once before. I must gain her confidence, then make her a little afraid of me; praise Cyril for qualities he does not possess, and which I will affect; soothe her vanity, flatter her; and then, when she does not know which way to turn, play my grand stroke—Miss Kate Ffrench."

The afternoon of the return from Thames Ditton he went to the house. Carry was at home, expectant. She had "dressed" for him, and was gracefully *posed* upon a sofa when he entered. A fortnight back, she would have risen, and perhaps blushed a little. She did neither now.

"I have been waiting for you," she said.

"I was detained by business or I should have been here sooner."

And then he began to tell all the scandal he could remember or invent.

It was a theory with Rupert that women like tyranny, and in his assignations, it was usually the lady who arrived first. With the class of women with whom he was a favourite, this method of treatment was highly successful; so he naturally enough fell into the error of supposing that the "spaniel and walnut-tree" proverb applied to the sex generally. This by the way. However, in this particular case, his theory held good, and Carry thought how powerful her attractions must be to tear from his affairs of State such a magnate as Mr. Rupert Dacre.

She was rejoiced at his arrival. The life she led was

very dreary, so dreary that at times she became low-spirited and hysterical, and would frighten the two maids by violent fits of passion and tears. She was fast losing all her illusions, and, instead of happy wedded life, a barren waste of loveless satiety spread out before her. She was innocent and experienced, ignorant and wise together. For her there existed two worlds; one sordid, base, composed of turned dresses, cleaned gloves, and mean schemes and cares; the other, brilliant and dazzling, set with diamonds, and glittering with gold—a world lit by wax candles, that shed their soft glow upon fair women and noble men—a world rustling with silks and instinct with perfumes—the world of “society.”

With the first she was too familiar; of the second she was too ignorant. She stood upon the debateable ground, midway between Philistia and Bohemia. She knew nothing of quiet happiness. Her memory served but to show her the dingy lodging-house, the enforced music lessons, the hateful round of petty deceit and penny hypocrisy. Her marriage seemed to have opened heaven to her, but in a very little time the glowing, perfumed torch lit by love, went out in unsavoury moulderings and smokings; her imagination then came to her rescue—or destruction. This was not Life; her early dreams could not end like this; there must be something wrong with the matrimonial machinery. Poets and romancers spoke of another world to that in which she found herself: they told her of a land where all was fair, and love was immortal, where there were no jealousies, no bickerings, no heart-burnings, no deceptions. Alas!

A shore like that, my dear,
Lies where no man will steer,
No maiden land.

Cyril—the Fairy Prince who was to have worked such wonders—had proved to be selfish and conceited. Instead of a lover who would cherish, protect, and advise her, she found a husband cold, satirical, vain, and heartless. A husband who was ashamed of his wife. There was the sting. She could have forgiven harsh usage, and violence of anger; but the evident coldness with which her husband treated her cut her to the heart.

In this mood Rupert Dacre, rich, courteous, kind, well-bred, and, above all, well informed as to her little story, was acceptable. She could talk to him, and be advised by him. He was a charming companion, and a useful friend; moreover, there was just enough danger about the intimacy to make it exciting. Carry felt the same pleasure as that experienced by the little *gamins*, who run along bridge-parapets—there is a *chance* of falling off.

But she meant no harm. Unfortunately, it does not always take two people to make a *liaison*—harmless or otherwise. Some wit said, that “When people fall in love, one *loves*, the other is loved.” If the lover happens to be astute, and in earnest, as was the case with Dacre, the loved usually gives way to superior strength, and yields.

Dacre opened the ball.

“I wrote to your husband to-day.”

“Yes?”

“Not that I had much to say, but I want to find out when he is coming back. It is strange that he has not written.”

“I have received one letter from him. He says that his father would be annoyed if he returned suddenly.”

Dacre did not speak, but his silence was more significant than words.

Carry blushed, and then her fingers tapped the table impatiently.

Dacre got up and crossed to the fireplace.

“And you only received one letter?”

“Only one; but he has been busy, I daresay, and—”

“Yes, I expect he has had his time well occupied.”

Carry's fingers beat faster. Her colour went and came. Dacre sighed.

It was out of pity for her—pity for the neglected wife! All her little soul was up in arms at once.

“Tell me about this Miss Ffrench,” said she.

“There is little to tell. She is a ‘cousin.’ She was brought up with him, and I fancy that his father always expected that they would marry.”

“Is she pretty?”

“Yes, more than pretty—beautiful.”

Carry sat down again, and her eyes filled with slowly-welling tears.

"Oh, it is impossible!" she said at last, in a low voice, "He cannot be so dishonourable, so cowardly."

"It is not my place to accuse him. I would not have spoken at all, but for your sake."

"You did it all in kindness, I know," she sobbed.

Dacre smiled, and then crossed the room to where she sat.

"Don't cry!" he said. "My suspicions are foolish: but you asked me, and I could not help telling you."

But, in exact proportion to his defence of her husband, so did her anger increase. Dacre knew this. Had he attacked the absent Cyril openly, the wife would have refused to listen to a syllable. He was too well versed in woman-nature to make that error.

At last she pretended to be convinced, and he soothed her in quite a parental manner. This was the sort of game that was played between them each day; and Carry felt that she was losing at it.

Having calmed her, he began to flatter. Having shown her how brutal the husband was, he wished to let her see how kind the lover could be.

"I wish you would sing for me," he said. "That last song of yours is ringing in my ears yet. Come, you must not give way to this feeling of loneliness; you will lose all your spirits. Your eyes are not so bright to-day."

Carry laughed and looked full at him. She *had* fine eyes, and she knew it.

"What song shall I sing?"

"This."

And he picked out a German ballad about a noble heart pining in hopeless love for some unapproachable princess. She sang, and he affected to let his thought wander, and turned over the leaf with an apologetic start. as though he too longed for an unattainable woman. He acted very well, and she could not mistake his meanings.

"Thanks would be mockery," he said, as she rose from the piano. "I am sorry I asked you to sing."

It was her turn to affect to misunderstand.

"Do you like this better?"

And she dashed off a brilliant piece of Offenbach's champagne-madness.

Dacre watched her with interest. She looked very charming, there could be no doubt about it, and she played well and artistically. He began to lose his head a little.

"Brava!" he cried, when the reckless melody came to an end in a final crash, which made the glass drops in the tiny candelabra ring again. "Brava! you play magnificently."

"I like Offenbach."

"His music is like yourself—sparkling, delicate, brilliant. Have you ever seen any of his operas?"

"No, I have not been to a theatre for a long time."

"Ah! there is no opera now, unfortunately. This is the dull season."

"Yes, it is very dull."

"You find it so, I am sure. Ah!"

And he started, as if a bright thought had suddenly struck him.

"There is a new burlesque to-night at the Isthmian. Quantox, the manager, is an old friend of mine, and always has a box at my disposal. Will you come?"

"Alone! Oh, Mr. Dacre, it would look so strange!"

Dacre laughed merrily.

"Strange! Not at all. No one will see you; no one would know you if they did see you. If you put up your hood we can go in quite quietly. Come, it will do you good."

She hesitated. She would like to go. Her life was dull—very dull. There could not be much harm. A private box, too!

"Could not we take mamma?"

Dacre inwardly shuddered. The idea of Mrs. Manton in a private box at the Isthmian with the aristocratic Rupert Dacre!

"I am afraid that my ticket only admits two" (palpable lie to anyone but Carry). "I will give it to your mother if you like; but then it will look strange, two ladies going alone. Oh, come with me! There is no occasion to be afraid. I will come for you at seven o'clock. Full toilette, mind! We will criticise the new piece together."

She consented.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"THERE IS A PROVIDENCE THAT SHAPES OUR ENDS."

MR. SAVILLE CHATTERIS was rejoiced at his son's return to the paths of virtue. The old *diplomat* began to dream of future glories, of seats in parliament, of snug "places," and fat pensions. The neighbouring borough of Kirkminster was open, so he thought, to his son. Kirkminster was a cathedral and a garrison, and, therefore, aristocratic; but it was also a "pottery" town, and, therefore, democratic. The city was divided against itself. The town proper was dull and conservative; the town improper was lively and radical. In the quiet, old-fashioned, heavy-mullioned houses that drowsed under the shade of the Minster, lived the *haute noblesse* of the place. The quantity of deans, and dignitaries, that clustered like bees around the cathedral hive, was enormous. Scarcely less great was the crowd of pious spinsters, and remnants of ancient families, waifs and strays of Burke and Debrett, washings from the cask of blue blood imported at the Conquest, who vegetated like fungi in the quiet lanes and alleys that intersected the Cathedral Close. Lying as it did, obscured by buildings, and flanked by quaint gardens and mysterious cloisters, the cathedral itself seemed like a *pieuvre*, stretching out its long arms in every direction. You could not take two lingual steps in the Old Town without treading upon some sensitive ecclesiastical tentacle, that seized you with resistless grip instantly. Everybody seemed to be connected mysteriously with the great inert mass that lay in the Cathedral Close. The deans, and what not, hung on like leeches to the monstrous wen, and were not to be torn from their hold, save by the administration of the strongest savouring episcopal salt that could be scraped together. In the dark lanes and alleys lived antiquated and faded persons, who had lived for years upon the crumbs from the table of the church. Even Miss Flittering, the little staymaker, who lived behind a *corsage* and glass case, owned a brother who, when he was not robbing nests or breaking windows, was a chorister, with the most angelic of voices and the whitest of surplices.

The interests of the Old Town were bound up with those of the cathedral, and the interests of the cathedral were Conservative in the most mummifying sense of the word.

But in the New Town the case was widely different. There, a king had arisen who knew not the Joseph of Vested Rights. Some twenty years before, an intelligent person from Staffordshire discovered that the Loamshire clay was remarkably well adapted for the making of pots, and, by dint of industry and perseverance, established a pottery four miles from the sacred circle of county and cathedral domesticity. The pottery trade being a profitable one, this ingenious person from Stafford flourished, and at the time of which I am writing, was one of the wealthiest men in the shire. The "potteries," were the great thorn in the side of Kirkminsterian flesh. The pottery hands were vulgar, not to say noisy and violent. They were free livers, free speakers, and for the most part, free thinkers. They would not come into the fold of the cathedral at any price. In vain did the Dean and Chapter pipe, these unhappy persons sedulously refused to dance to any but the most secular tunes. The men drank beer and smoked, and swore and fought, to their hearts' content; the women saved their husbands' earnings if they could, and the girls wore bright ribbons, and admired the "military." The "military" was the bond between the Old and New Town. The barracks were just half way from the hill that led from the cathedral to the Potteries; and, while the officers were whirling the daughters of the righteous to the dulcet music of Coote, the soldiers were drinking pots of heavy at the Flying Wheel or the Workman's Arms, or disporting themselves in the brightly lighted dancing halls of the New Town. Indeed, if the truth were told, the "little parties," and quiet "at homes" of the Dean and Chapter were often deserted for the more exciting, if less elevating, pleasures of the Royal Kirkminster Theatre, or the New Town Singing Saloon. The —th was not a moral regiment—indeed, it could scarcely be expected to have been, with Brentwood for its colonel—and Ponsonby and Hethrington, together with other dashing fellows, and 'Queen's hard

bargains' were better known by the pottery folk than they themselves would care to confess.

This was the borough, then, which Saville Chatteris wished his son to contest against no less a person than the mighty Wheales himself. At present, the prevailing political tone in Kirkminster was morbidly reformatory. Wheales, barrister-at-law and mouth-orator generally, had defeated Sir Thomas Blunderbore by an overwhelming majority, and was carried triumphantly into Parliament upon the shoulders of the mob. But rumours were afloat to the effect that in the ensuing election Wheales would be worsted; that the wind-bags of that mighty Agitator had suddenly collapsed, and the Potteries were disgusted at the shallowness of their representative. Still the old hatred of the Blunderborian type of candidate would not suffer them to elect the Lord of the Beeches, and the wily diplomatist hoped that Master Cyril would slip in, sandwich-wise, between the two opposing forces. "My name will carry the gentry and the tenantry, and his own Radical nonsense will go down with the Potteries. He shall go in on moderate liberal principles, and his connection with the paper will, perhaps, do him more good than harm."

When the subject was broached to Cyril, he felt rather terrified at the prospect.

"Contest Kirkminster with Wheales! My dear father, it would be madness."

"Nothing of the kind, sir," returned Saville. "It is always good policy to fly high at first. If you succeed, people will consider you a very clever fellow, and if you fail, they will call you either 'plucky' or 'presumptuous';—for a young man, either phase is complimentary in political life."

"But the expense?"

"Never mind the expense. The result of a success will amply repay outlay. Will you consent to stand?"

"Oh, I consent, of course," said Cyril, who would have consented to take the post of Past Grand Master at a Masonic dinner had his father asked it.

So Kate was duly told of the approaching struggle, and pretended to be much interested in blue books, and to

know all about the state of the laws regarding Church Property.

Dacre sending down news of the New Party, and the Nantwichian scheme being commented upon by the London journals with various degrees of severity, Saville suggested that his son should go up to town, see Dacre, gather from him the plans of the forthcoming struggle, and proclaim himself an ally of the Mediating faction. This suited Cyril to a nicety. He would go up to town, see Dacre, quiet his wife, then return to his love once more.

So he went up with Hethrington, who said that he had received a mysterious note from Jack Ponsonby, concerning "Calverly's horse, you know;" and of which it behoved him, Hethrington, to take immediate cognisance.

When they reached town it was seven o'clock in the evening. Cyril drove straight to Brook Street, and Hethrington, who knew the improbability of meeting the Hon. John after four in the afternoon, went with him "to look up old Rupert."

"Old Rupert," unfortunately, was not at home. The grave Harris informed the two gentlemen that Mr. Dacre had just gone out, and "hordered the cab to be at the Isthmian Theayter at a quarter hafter eleven."

"By Jove!" says Hethrington. "Good idea, Chatty! There's a new burlesque or something, I saw in the papers. Let's go!"

So they went.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DUET AND A SOLO.

THERE was a crowded house at the Isthmian, although it was not the fashionable season. The boxes and stalls were overflowing with well-dressed men and women. All London is not out of town in February, and the patrons of the Quantoxian Temple of Thespis were not of the *élite* of the upper ten thousand. The Isthmian had established itself as the theatre *par excellence* for comedy

and burlesque. The pieces were well put upon the stage; the actresses were young, *piquantes*, and pretty; the house was well lighted and cheerful; and, above all, the *entrée* behind the scenes was difficult of achievement. So it became the great theatre for young men about town, the special place for "looking in at" after dinner.

The new burlesque was some travesty of a classical story; something which gave scope for plenty of pink silk and popular melody; an unsubstantial *meringue* of song and dance, a *bonbon* cracker petillant with puns, a midsummer night's dream of pretty faces and short petticoats.

Carry was delighted at her daring holiday. Thanks to Dacre's skilful manipulation of box-keepers, they had reached the little doll's house on the second tier, which had been for some two years back appropriated to the especial use of Lord Nantwich's private secretary and his especial friends, without observation. After the usual preliminary flutter, she composed her raiment, and looked about her.

The curtain had just risen upon the first piece, a comedietta, in which Miss Letty Lefanu (she afterwards married Lord Windermere, the defendant in the great lunacy case), played a brilliant *belle Marquise*, who marries a true-hearted spendthrift and becomes *dévoté*.

Carry was not very much interested in the piece. The wit was a little too fine for her, and though she laughed when the other people laughed, she was not particularly amused, and longed for the burlesque to begin. Dacre was tired, too. He had seen the vamped-up French absurdity before, and he amused himself with leaning back behind the curtain of the box and watching Carry's face.

She looked her best that night. She was, as Dacre had suggested, *en grande toilette*, and her large eyes were dilated with excitement. As she leant back, and chatted and laughed, Dacre felt proud of her presence. He was tolerably vain, and he hoped that some one of his friends would see him. That is, some one of his bachelor friends; for with the "seniors" Dacre passed for a model of morality. He was in excellent spirits this evening. He had won a victory. Three weeks back Carry would have refused point-blank to come with him alone to a theatre.

His careful diplomacy, however, had been successful, and she regarded him as a friend. He had compromised her now at all events. The ice was broken. Moreover, reposing snugly in the pocket of his *paletôt*, was a letter from Saville Chatteris, which he had received that evening.

"She can't resist such a proof as this," said he; "but I will not use it until everything else fails."

There was a hum and murmur in the house as the "act-drop" fell. The occupants of the stalls shifted their seats, in order to bring their *lorgnettes* to bear upon the boxes with greater ease. The scuffle of feet in the galleries sounded like the breaking of a sea upon shingle, and from the dense pit arose a ceaseless buzzing. Careful matrons produced bottles of refreshment; baldheaded papas wiped their foreheads with satisfactory grunts of relief; fast shop-boys went out to drink and smoke; flirtations were resumed with vigour, and the gilded youth of the boxes told each other as many lies as they could invent upon short notice, concerning the actresses in the forthcoming piece.

"And what do you think of Miss Lefanu?" asked Dacre.

"I like her very much," says Carry.

Dacre laughed.

"The stereotyped answer! Did you think she acted well?"

"Don't be satirical, Mr. Dacre! I did like her, really. It must be very hard work for her."

"Hard work! Not at all. It is only half-past nine, and she goes home for the evening. When I knew her first, she was a milliner's apprentice at Weston-super-mare. She was harder worked then."

"It must be a strange life?"

"Whose?"

"An actress's."

"Why strange? It is as much a trade as diplomacy—only it isn't always so well paid. You have the same idea, I suppose that all people have who are ignorant of stage customs. You imagine that actors identify themselves with their parts, and that *Ophelia* is weeping in the green-room, because of *Hamlet's* perfidy—that *Lady Macbeth* begins to be dangerous an hour before the curtain rises,

and that *Juliet* is thinking of her *Romeo*. Not at all. *Ophelia* is probably mending her stockings, *Lady Macbeth* thinking of little Tommy at home, who has the measles, and *Juliet*, who is thirty-five and drinks, is wondering if she shall wear her old brocade dress in 'Venice Preserved,' to avoid the expense of a new one."

"Oh! Mr. Dacre, you are in a bad humour this evening, I think."

"I speak facts."

"Well, I don't like my romance destroyed."

"I won't destroy it, then. The stage is everything that is delightful."

"No, I don't think that."

"Come, Mrs. Chatteris, let me disabuse your mind of prejudices. There are but two general opinions about the stage. One held by the young man of the day, who takes his information out of third-rate novels, written by men who have never spoken to any one above the rank of a ballet girl. This class of man thinks that actresses must of necessity be the proprietors of broughams, poodle-dogs, villas, and millionaires in the city. This is wrong. The other class believes that the stage is all poetry and excitement; that actresses live on milk and honey, and are all exquisitely intellectual. This is equally wrong. The fact is that the stage is like the world it mimics—a mixture of good and evil, with the latter unhappily predominating. There is nothing poetical about it."

"There is something fascinating to me in the word, 'actress,'" said Carry.

Rupert laughed. "Romancing again! I have known a great many, and I have come to one conclusion regarding them."

"What is that?"

"That they are very much like other women!"

"How provoking you are, sir!" but the curtain rose again upon an exquisite picture of one of the Grecian islands, and Carry's attention was absorbed at once.

The modern passion for burlesque is significant. It is like the American greed for sweetmeats, indicative of unhealthy stomachs. The burlesque is the apotheosis of fooling. It was pleasant in the hands of Planché. Byron

makes it wearisome. It appeals wholly to the senses, the intellect is left out of the question. But the people like it, and the people pay. There is the secret. The critics in the boxes condemn it as nonsense, but they come and see it; the people in the pit think it delightful, and they pay also. Maxwell Hurst was talking to Fleem (of the *Spatterday Review*) upon the subject.

"What abominable nonsense!" said he. "Hark at the stuff that girl is singing to that lovely little air!"

"The public don't care about words," said Fleem.

"The drama is going to the dogs, nowadays."

"In old times the dramatists used to go there."

"I cannot understand it. I looked in at the —— as I came up. 'Othello' was going on to empty boxes."

"It is the fault of the actors, not the public," said Fleem. "In these times nobody learns anything. We all live too fast. If the people go to see 'Othello,' they go to see *one* character, and, having seen it, they go away. You never see a play put properly on the stage. Nobody plays minor parts; they all want to be officers. Thirty years ago you had a play 'cast'; now it is run up by contract. People cannot be always seeing Mr. Brown as *Hamlet*, or Mr. Jones as *Othello*. They want to see a *play*, not a character."

"You don't call this a play?"

"Yes, I do. All the actors are above the average, but they can play nothing else. That is what I complain of."

"The thing is easy enough to understand. The public find Shakespeare badly done, and burlesque well done. They go and see burlesque. Actors find that they can make more money by singing doggerel at a concert hall than by learning their profession at a theatre. They go to the concert hall. The thing will right itself some day."

"I hope it will," said Hurst, as a shower of *bouquets* marked the appreciation of the boxes for a "breakdown."
"I shall go and smoke."

Despite Mr. Hurst's virtuous indignation, the audience were delighted. The young men in the stalls applauded furiously. Hethrington was in raptures.

"By Jove! how good! Bravo! I say, Chatteris, did you see that? Chatteris, I say!"

But Chatteris paid no attention. His friend turned to look at him. He was staring with all the power of his glasses into a little box on the second tier.

"What is the matter, Cyril?"

He turned round, and Hethrington could see that his face was deathly pale.

"I don't feel well," he said. "Let me pass, will you? I shall go home."

But the pair in Dacre's box were so interested in the play that the confusion caused by his sudden exit was unnoticed by them.

Hethrington seemed a little alarmed at his friend's violent disappearance, but composed himself again as the rustle of angry silk subsided. "Just like him," was his muttered reflection. "Always cutting away mysteriously."

Hethrington, like most of his class, detested anything approaching to a "scene," and was somewhat sulky at the attention of the audience being drawn to his immediate neighbourhood. He soon composed himself, however, and when the curtain fell, walked calmly down to the "Rag," dismissing all mental comment upon Cyril's sudden illness with the first whiff of the "choice Trabuco," which soothed his never very active brain.

Dacre took Mrs. Chatteris home to the Evangelical groves, as in duty bound, and even accompanied her within doors.

"Well, and how did you enjoy yourself?" he asked, as Carry, flinging off her opera-cloak, sat down somewhat wearily by the fire.

"Very much," said she, and her eyes glistened. "It was very kind of you to take me—very kind."

Dacre—who had been revolving many things during the homeward drive—thought that the auspicious moment had arrived at last. He sat down in a chair by the side of the sofa, and leant across to her.

"It was not 'kind' at all," he said. "It was selfishness made me take you."

Her cheeks flushed, and she played with the little screen that she held in her hands, nervously.

"What do you mean?"

He bent his head still lower, and tried to take her

hand, but before he could touch it the door opened, and raising her eyes, Carry saw her husband.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DRIVEN TO BAY.

WHEN Cyril Chatteris left the theatre, his first impulse was to go straight home, and there to await his wife. With that desperate intent, he walked violently up the street. His brain was hot, and his heart beating furiously. He was of an excitable temperament, and the sight of the slave, whom he had imagined so patiently awaiting her master's return, disporting herself in purple and fine linen at a well-lighted theatre in company with Rupert Dacre, had startled him out of all his pretended placidity.

Secure in his self-conceit, he had never imagined that his wife would have eyes for any other man but her lawful lord, and his vanity was rudely shocked. As he walked, however, his passion began to evaporate.

"I am not going to be jealous, surely!" he laughed; and then the old thought came back to him again.

Put into words, it would run something in this way:

"I am married to a woman I dislike. I have promised to marry another woman whom I love. There is only one way to break the bond."

What that way must be, he scarcely dared consider.

"What a fool I was to marry her!" he cried out, in the bitterness of his soul.

It had begun to rain, and the pavement was wet and shining. Foot passengers were hurrying home, and the omnibus horses steamed as those vehicles pulled up jerkily to admit fresh bundles of bedraggled humanity. But Cyril did not feel the rain. He was too busy thinking. He walked on in the direction of St. John's Wood mechanically; and the faster he walked the more perplexed he became. Should he take no notice of what he had seen, and leave matters to chance? No; he was not so utterly base as that. He did not love, perhaps; but his

pride, his wounded honour, tingled in every nerve. Those red lips, that supple figure, that wealth of brown hair, had no charms for him; but the girl was his wife, and insulted honour joined in chorus with wounded vanity. What should be his future course he knew not; at present his only care was to reach home at once. There arose in his mind a half-formed thought that the opportunity he had so often longed for had come at last, and that he might discard his wife at once and for ever; but he would not give the thought words, even to himself. He would see.

The cab was still at the door. The light in the drawing-room was burning brightly. He unlocked the latch and entered the hall.

In another instant he had opened the door, and surprised Dacre almost in the act of raising his wife's hand to his lips.

The sight startled him out of all composure. "You scoundrel!" he cried, and stepped forward into the room.

Dacre was startled too. The vision of an enraged and injured husband was farthest from his thoughts. He believed Cyril to be at Matcham. What should he do? To be balked in the moment of victory was galling enough, but the position in which he found himself was ridiculous. He rose and stood by the sofa, an angry flush on his face, but spoke never a word.

Carry—the first impulse of shame and terror over—felt, strange as it may seem, an impulse of affection to the man who had saved her. Her husband did love her then, after all, and he had not deserted her.

She ran to him, and would have thrown herself on his heart.

But his eyes were looking straight over her at Dacre, and she stopped midway.

"Cyril!" she cried—"Cyril! will you not speak to me?"

His face was white, and his lips compressed. All his long-felt, long-concealed hatred for Dacre boiled up in his heart. The sight he had seen at the door put all his worldly maxims to flight. A red mist was before his eyes, and something seemed to rise in his throat and choke him.

Carry was seized with sudden, deadly terror. She had never seen that look before on human face, but some instinct told her that it meant Murder. She sank at her husband's feet in extremity of terror.

"Cyril, what do you mean! I meant no harm. I had been——"

He shook off her grasp, and she fell, face downwards, upon the floor. Another step brought him face to face with Dacre.

"Now sir, explain what you do here?" he said, in a low voice, husky with intensity of passion.

The interval of respite had been brief, but it had been long enough for Rupert Dacre to collect his thoughts. He saw one way of escape, and he availed himself of it.

"I came to tell your wife that her husband had promised to marry another woman," he said in a low voice.

Cyril's face turned from white to scarlet in an instant, and he raised his clenched hand to strike.

Dacre caught his arm.

"Silence, you fool!" he hissed. "I have not told her yet. Shall I do so now?"

The blow was craftily dealt, and it went home.

Cyril Chatteris dropped his eyes.

"Come, get up!" he cried, brutally enough, to the prostrate figure on the carpet. "I'm not going to hurt you!"

Dacre was master of the situation in an instant. He rang the bell.

"Cyril, my dear fellow, how you startled us all! Allow me, Mrs. Chatteris! Overcome with joy! Always the same, Chatteris,—always impetuous and headstrong!"

He raised Carry from the ground.

"I have saved you!" he whispered. "Don't be afraid!" then aloud, as the summoned maid-servant appeared, "Good night, Mrs. Carter. You will be better in an hour or so; the excitement has been too much for you."

She pressed his hand, and as the door closed, he turned away from the sofa, where Cyril was sitting, to conceal a smile.

Cyril felt thoroughly beaten, and his rage increased. He was no match for Dacre, and he felt it. Perhaps,

after all, he had wronged his wife. His father was constantly writing to Dacre, and, perhaps, one of those letters might have contained the news of his intended marriage. Yet why should Dacre take the trouble to find out Carry and tell her? He turned round with a vicious snarl, like a fox at bay.

"What game is this that you are playing?" he asked.

Dacre leant against the mantelpiece in his favourite attitude, and looked down upon his questioner with easy contempt.

By the way, have you ever remarked, reader, the vast mental superiority which an erect posture seems to give a conversational adversary?

"Upon my word, Chatteris," he said, "I think that you are the most disagreeable, unreasonable fellow I have ever met. I have gone out of my way,—put myself to considerable trouble and inconvenience, to do you a service, and you rush into the house like the injured husband in one of your favourite French novels, and enact all sorts of heroics."

Having thrown up his arms, Cyril's only course was to accept the position with the best grace he could.

"That's nonsense!" said he. "I came home unexpectedly, and—Besides," he continued, suddenly awaking to the consciousness that the interference of his friend was perfectly unwarranted—"who told you I was going to be married?"

Dacre's white hand carelessly strayed to a pocket, and produced a letter. Cyril recognised his father's handwriting.

"Your father told me. Here is the old gentleman's letter, breathing all sorts of tender hopes for future amendment. He doesn't know of this charming little dove-cote, I suppose."

Cyril was not endowed with any great amount of filial affection, but I suppose no man likes to hear his father laughed at to his face. He rose angrily, but contented himself with walking up and down the room.

"What business is it of yours?" he said at last.

"Theoretically, none. Practically, a highly-interesting study of human nature. Look here, Cyril,—I am not of

a deeply-religious turn of mind, but, upon my word, you have been behaving shamefully. Why did you not trust me at first?"

Cyril laughed bitterly.

"I suppose you think that I am not trustworthy. You are a very ungrateful boy,—after all I have done for you. However, that is nothing to the purpose. I promised your father that I would look after you, and I have kept my word."

"I wish to heaven I had never seen you!"

"Possibly; but having seen me, you must take the consequences. Now, don't be an impetuous young booby, but let us talk over your future prospects. What do you intend to do? To go down to Matcham as I suggested, and marry your cousin after the old programme?"

Cyril looked up sharply. Was it possible that Dacre did not know that he was married already? He would try and discover.

"Suppose I am?"

"Then the not unnatural question arises—what is to become of the lady up-stairs?"

"I don't know—and I don't care."

Dacre laughed outright. The obstinacy of his friend amused him. "He still will persist then in denying the marriage," he thought.

"I have heard and read of young gentlemen like you," he said aloud, "but I never met one before. You are a perfect paragon of vice, my boy. Why, you don't mean to deny your marriage, to *me*, surely?"

Cyril, driven to bay for the last time, grew savage. "Look here, Dacre—I've had enough of this. I've told you twice before that I am not married."

"Precisely, and you lied each time. Don't start. I tell lies myself sometimes—most private secretaries do. But as I happen to know that you *are* married, you may as well confess it. You were married to Miss Manton the same day that I sent you the telegram which announced your brother's death."

Cyril turned sick with fear. He was discovered, then. His schemes were at an end. His folly and cowardice had brought him to this pitch. If he had only accepted his fortune, and told the truth at first, all might have been

well. Now, he was entangled beyond hope of freedom. The blow stunned him, and he was silent.

"It is a lie!" he burst out at last. "I was never married! The girl thought so, curse her—but I was not married. Do you hear, Dacre, I was *not* married!"

It was Dacre's turn to be puzzled now. This persistency of denial staggered him. Could there have been some evasion of law of which he knew nothing? Could the young man have deceived everybody, even the wary mother-in-law herself? It might be so.

"She is not your wife, then?"

"No."

"Upon your honour!"

"Upon my honour."

Dacre threw himself back in his chair and laughed.

"You *are* the cleverest scoundrel I know," he said.

Cyril's blood was up again at this fresh insult, but he dared not speak.

"And you really mean to marry Miss Ffrench?"

"Yes."

"My dear boy, I congratulate you. She is a charming girl, and will make an excellent wife. It is the best thing you could do. Forgive me my suspicions; but you managed the thing so cleverly that I was deceived."

It was a new sensation to Cyril to be congratulated for successful villany, and he did not half like the sensation.

"You are going to join our Party, your father tells me," went on Dacre, in an ordinary tone. "I am very glad of that. I think that we can get you in for Kirkminster with a little trouble. Upon my word, my dear fellow, I am so glad to find that you are not as deeply in the mire as I thought you were."

And the good fellow actually sprang up and shook the boy's hand warmly.

"Of course, when I heard of your engagement, I felt bound—for Miss Ffrench's sake—to come and find out the truth of Miss Manton's story. I am *so* glad to find that my suspicions were not confirmed. Marrying beneath one's self is the deadliest of social errors; and although the little girl is very charming and very accomplished, she is not a fit wife for a man in your position."

Cyril was in an agony of shame. One moment he felt inclined to tell the truth, defend his honour, and dash the smiling scoundrel before him to the earth; the next, the thought of Kate and his father would come before him, and he could only grind his teeth helplessly.

Dacre took out his watch.

"Nearly two o'clock! I must go. You had better come down to the office to-morrow, and we will have a chat. Of course this little matter"—he nodded his head at the piano as the nearest embodiment of womanhood—"will be entirely between ourselves. It is a sad thing, but it might have been worse. We must think of some plan to get rid of the little girl. You can't send her back to her mother, of course?"

Cyril did not speak. He could not. Dacre attributing his silence to a totally different cause from the real one, went on.

"These affairs are always difficult to settle, but if you are really tired of the girl—and I suppose you must be—you had better get some friend to take her off your hands."

The wretched boy on the sofa never moved. He scarcely understood the meaning of the words. His perceptions were dulled by violence of restrained passion. He felt Dacre take his hand, and he was dimly conscious that he murmured some phrase of farewell in answer to the other's "good night." Then the door shut, and he was alone.

He sat quite still. He did not curse or scream, or indulge in any impotent ebullition of rage. He had been hit too hard for that. The memory of his shame weighed upon him like a gravestone. He felt degraded in his own eyes. All his vanity and self-conceit had been crushed out of him, and he sat with his head in his hands, like one who has just received some heavy blow. At last some purpose began to shape itself out of this chaos of misery. His thought had been put into words at last, and after the first horror which its embodiment had induced, he could bear to look on it calmly. "Get some one to take her off your hands." Yes, that was the hideous thought that had arisen to him in the library at Matcham. He

shuddered even now at it. But it was his own idea. It might be done. Such things did happen. Men have kept worse secrets before now. It was the only way.

He rose, and mechanically extinguishing the lights, went up stairs.

His wife was asleep, her brown hair scattered over the pillow, and her eyes red with recent tears. There was a phial of laudanum on the little table by the bed (Carry did not always sleep soundly now), and his bloodshot eyes wandered from the sleeping face to the printed word upon the tiny bottle that held the drug. Yes, there was another way yet.

"She might die, perhaps!" he said, half unconsciously.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SPES ET PRÆMIA IN AMBIGUO.

THE party of Intellect and Culture, of which Mr. Rupert Dacre was the secret social exponent; was getting on famously. Intelligent mediocrity flocked around its banner, and Nantwich saw himself placed silently at the head of a devoted band of followers. In smoking-rooms and club-rooms it was the fashion to pooh-pooh the masses and laugh at the Tories; and the New Party had it all their own way. Dacre saw bright visions of future place and fame rise daily before him. All seemed rose-coloured, and he forgot his debts in the expectation of the triumphs that were to follow the successful issue of Nantwich's scheme. The addition of the Chatteris interest was also pleasant. Old Saville was a man of some note among the "fogies," and his son was a very good card to play at political whist tables, where Conservatism was pre-eminent. The secret of the famous *Mercury* article was well kept, at all events by Dacre, and Cyril himself did not suspect that his friend knew of his delinquency.

The morning after the eventful interview recorded in the last chapter, Dacre awoke high in hope and hugely self-complacent. "I came out of that little scrape last night very well," he thought. "It is lucky that I preserved my presence of mind. The notion of the letter was a

capital one. I wonder if the fellow is married after all. Upon my word, he puzzles me. He *must* have lied. It would have been impossible for him to have deceived that old she-dragon of a mother-in-law. Moreover, if he had not been absolutely married, my shot about 'his wife' would not have told. Now the question is,—which course am I to take. Shall I let this affair go on, put the boy in for Kirkminster, let him marry his cousin, and hold my knowledge of the Manton business over his head *in terrorem*; or, shall I tell Miss Ffrench the whole story, and give the Australian fellow a clear stage? I think that the former plan is the best,—or stay, I might go in and marry the girl myself, put up with Cyril for the borough, let the story of Foozleton's letter leak out, and so ruin his chance of success. Mr. Rupert Dacre, M.P. for Kirkminster, and son-in-law to old Chatteris, leader of the Cultured Party, and *âme damnée* of the Prime Minister, would be a very different fellow from the present Rupert Dacre, private secretary and expectant place-holder. To be sure, the game is not only risky, but rascally; but then, nowadays, we must soil our fingers a little. My position is tolerably desperate, and I do not much care what I do in the way of gentlemanly wickedness. However, I must first see that the ground is safe. I think I will go down to the musty old church in Dym Street, and turn up the register of my young friend's marriage."

So cogitating he ordered breakfast, and soon was deep in the *Times'* leading article.

At the office a card awaited him—a thick, sharp-edged, uncompromising card—upon which was imprinted the name of "MR. ROBERT BINNS." Dacre turned the pasteboard over. "Will call again at 3.30," was written in pencil on the other side.

"When did this come, Davis?"

"Early this morning, sir. Young man left it."

"What the deuce can the fellow want with me?" thought Dacre, as he settled himself to await the arrival of his "young friend." "However, he comes in a good hour. I can pump him about the marriage business."

By and by, Nantwich came. Puffily, of course. Nantwich was always in a nervous tremor now.

"Morning, Dacre—morning! Any letters? No, of course not. Hum!—ah! Seen the *Times*? Of course you have. Looks well for us, eh?—looks well! Give them a tussle for it, eh? What?"

"I think that your lordship's success is certain," said the respectful secretary.

"Hope so—hope so. Nothing certain in this world; *spes et præmia*, you know. What is it—classics getting rusty. Must rub up—rub up."

"*Spes et præmia in ambiguo, certa funera et luctus*," says Dacre.

"True—true—*funera et luctus*. That's right; keep up your Latin. Good for quotations when you are in the House—eh? House likes Latin—eh? What?"

"By the way, sir, I hear that we are going to have an accession to our party in a quarter where we least expected it."

"Where's that?"

"Loamshire—Kirkminster."

"Kirkminster! Why, that's Wheales' place—stronghold. My dear Dacre, you must be mistaken. Who's the man?"

"A son of Saville Chatteris."

"E-e-eh—eh! Well—well—well! Chatteris' son, eh? What!—stop. I thought he was killed the other day—eh, what?"

"This is the second son, my lord; Cyril Chatteris."

"Oh, indeed! Ah—yes—just so. Smart young man, eh? Clever—talented? Sound, eh? What?"

"Well," says Dacre, with a smile, "he has not shown any very great proofs of talent yet; but he is smart enough—a little too smart, in fact."

"Oh—ah! Young men all alike. Must be curbed—eh?—curbed?"

"Exactly. He will take a good deal of curbing, too, I expect. Kirkminster is a powerful borough, you know, sir."

Lord Nantwich shuffled up and down the room with his hands behind his back.

"Pity so young a man—large place. Wheales leads those poor devils by the nose."

Dacre looked on in silence. He knew by the action of his chief that he was resolving some project in his

mind; and on these occasions it was the custom of the discreet secretary to preserve a judicious silence.

The brain of Lord Nantwich was not very fertile in invention, but it had a wonderful power of seizing hold of other men's ideas and producing them as its own. It was busy at the pleasant process now.

"I don't see, Dacre," said the noble lord, a little pettishly, "why you shouldn't go up for Kirkminster yourself."

"My dear lord!" cries Dacre, in pretended astonishment, "a penniless fellow like me contest a borough like Kirkminster!"

"Oh! stuff—stuff! Penniless! *You* know how these things are managed."

"Any course that your lordship thinks proper to suggest I shall consider myself bound to take."

"Of course—of course—of course!—Just so. I must think over the matter."

"Does your lordship wish me to contest the place with Chatteris?"

"Two members—two members—eh, what? Go in with him—keep him down—check—check, eh? Besides, Dacre, two strings to our bow—eh, what? If they won't have him—have you."

"But he will reckon upon the government support, my lord."

"Well, well, of course. Support both of you—both of you."

Dacre bowed silently. Here was an unlooked-for piece of fortune. The fruit was dropping into his hands almost as soon as he dared to hope for it. Nantwich shuffled off to the blue-baized door, and stopped midway to shuffle back again.

"Pottery-people—pottery-people, eh, what? Democrats—radicals—agitate—Wheales—eh? Perhaps, after all, money thrown away. What?"

"It is the stronghold of Trade-Unionism," said Dacre.

"True—true—yes. Powerful body. Eh, what? Could you get any information about the place—people. Eh?"

"I know it pretty well myself. I have a great many friends down about that quarter."

"Have we got anybody we could send down? Eh?"

Dacre's eye fell upon the thick card lying half-hidden by the official report of the acting deputy-vice-consul for the Andaman Islands, with reference to the insolence of an American barque (crew two men and a boy) in not returning the complimentary salute of the A.-D.-V.-C.'s newly imported brass cannon, and an idea occurred to him which made him laugh.

"Yes, my lord. I can send a man down who will give us particular reports of the state of popular feeling."

"Very well. Only be careful, you know—careful. You understand? Eh? What?"

"I understand, my lord," and Dacre bowed his patron to the door of his private room.

Then he sat down to think. He would get rid of Binns. He had several times met that young gentleman hovering round about the "dove-cote," where the dove (soiled or not, he didn't care) had been placed by Cyril. He was suspicious of Binns. Not that he feared him; he despised the boy too much for that; but because he wanted no unseemly course of practical or poetical interference to come between the wind and his profligate nobility. As to Cyril himself, he had not decided. He would see how matters went on. The crisis of his fate was approaching, and the still bright waters of the lagoon of social and political success shone temptingly just beyond the foaming and savage breakers through which his bark was now heavily labouring. His thoughts strayed away into pleasant places. No more debts or duns, or plottings. Social position: political success. Both were within his grasp. He had not done so badly after all. His stormy youth—for it had been stormy, though the world thought it fair enough—had given him experience.

"Yes," said he, rising, with a smile on his lips, "If I have spent my money, and got into debt, and put my talents out at hire, I have gained one thing which is worth all beside—knowledge of human nature!"

Just then the head of Davis was protruded at the doorway, and that worthy man seeing that Dacre was alone, announced "Mr. Robert Binns."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BINNS TO THE RESCUE!

BINNS was becoming heroic. It is strange how perversely Nature will sometimes reject the delicate fragments of aristocratic porcelain, and insist upon hewing her heroes out of rough and uncomely granite.

Poor Binns was not physically cast in an heroic mould. He was small and pimply. His hair did not fall in that graceful waviness that Art teaches us to believe is natural. His brow was not broad nor white, nor were his eyes in the faintest degree unfathomable. He was a very ordinary-looking young man indeed. But beneath his outer husk, Nature—perverse as usual—had given him a soul leagues above buttons. He was not handsome, or even clever, but he had a good heart and a warm imagination.

To achieve success in this world, one of two things is absolutely necessary,—a good heart, or a good head. By a good heart I do not mean that preposterous good-natured efflorescence of vanity which tends to make a man that curse to society—"nobody's enemy but his own,"—but I mean that quickness of sympathy which leads one human being to understand the likes and dislikes of another. One must either lead or drive mankind. Either win them by kindness and quickness of sympathy, or conquer them by the force of intellect. The former is the more pleasant, but it is the more dangerous; the latter is the more difficult, but it is the more effectual. Dacre and Cyril might be taken as types of the Intellectual party; Binns and Bland as types of the Sympathetic. Intellect was in the ascendant.

Dacre was a power in his own world, and Cyril had made whatever reputation he had obtained by his own abilities. Both were absolutely unscrupulous,—both intellectually egotistical. Poor Bland had made a sad failure in his vital speculation. He lent small sums of his "talent" of warm feeling and good nature to any needy friend who came upon the specious pretence of starvation and misery to ask for it, and the needy friend not repaying

him (needy friends never do), the poor fellow was wellnigh reduced to beggary. Binns had not done much better. He was famous after a fashion, but the ungrammatical plaudits of half-washed working men was not the fame he dreamt of. His sympathies had entangled him in a love affair which rendered him utterly miserable, and made him agonise to write poetry, to the neglect of the more solid comforts to be derived from the prospective partnership in a thriving grocer's shop. Heart was at the bottom of the tree, and Head at the top; but Head—as we know—was perhaps after all in a worse case than Heart.

The heart of Binns was attesting its presence with great vehemence. He was becoming a prey to devouring anxiety. Being young, I have no doubt that had he seen Carry frequently, his love for her would have worn out. But absence strengthened his attachment, and the discovery of Cyril's unkindness made him more ferociously in love than ever. He was continually hovering about St. John's Wood, and drinking the midnight air (to the detriment of his lungs) in order to watch the house where his mistress lay. He would come into Bland's room and insist upon dragging the good-natured fellow out into the street to walk with him. Bland grumbled a little, but went.

I do not know if I can make you understand the life that these two led together. They were great cronies. Binns respected Bland; and Bland liked Binns. The day was prosaic—humdrum—material—vulgar; the night was glorious—poetical—imaginative. In the day, Bland was the shabby, ill-paid reporter, whose only object in life appeared to be the scribbling of law reports upon flimsy paper, and was looked upon as a harmless, stupid old foggy, by the smart young fellows who "did" the law courts for the cheap papers.

In the day, Binns was the aproned assistant, greasy, pimply, and base, who wrapt up butter and weighed sugar and kept accounts. But as soon as benignant Night descended, all was changed. At night, Binns was the orator, the secretary, the poet; Bland, the essayist, the Mentor, the *raconteur*.

They would go out together and wander about the

gaslit streets, talking and observing. Binns would give vent to his impassioned soul, in tirades against wealth and tyranny—would pour out his hopes and loves into his companion's ear until some opposing force, in the shape of an on-coming foot passenger, would scatter the "winged words upon the heedless air."

Poor fellows! They both belonged to a class, which is surely of all classes cursed the heaviest. They were both cursed with the curse of *conscious mediocrity*.

Gifted with the faculty of appreciation and imitation, malignant fate had denied to them the power of originality. They saw the goal, but could not reach it. The very attributes that urged them to compete with others in the race for fame, condemned them to the torture of knowing that they would never emerge from the ruck of fourth-rate intellects. Bland had gone through the fire, and had settled down to vegetate. He lived, and was (tolerably) content. But Binns had not yet fully awakened to the hideous consciousness of his doom. He had written and read, and read and written, and the effort to evolve his finer thoughts had pleased him, but when the very power which enabled him to imitate showed him the inferiority of the imitation, his heart grew sick.

In vain did he strive to follow Bland's advice—given on that memorable evening when he had promised to protect the woman whom his boyish heart had picked out for an idol,—to make himself a name and place. All his efforts were useless, and he was beginning to confess to himself, with bitter agony of spirit, that upon him, too, had fallen the curse of mediocrity. He would seek consolation from Bland, who was always willing to give it, and would comfort himself with the belief that he had not yet found his *métier*.

Binns' ambition was to be a poet, and he would quote to Bland for hours. The kind-hearted reporter had not always the heart to show him his plagiarisms, and so the soul of the poor boy was comforted; and he would stray away to other topics—to the power of the working man, to the elevation of the masses, and to the glory of labour and the dignity of toil.

It was during one of these conversations that the footsteps

of the pair had wandered towards the usual spot—St. John's Wood. Poor Bland never remonstrated at the distance, but plodded on patiently. On this particular evening Binns noticed a cab at the door of the little cottage. All his heart cried out.

"Look there, Bland! Do you see? A cab. I shall wait."

"Nonsense!" says Bland. "Come along. What do you want to wait for?"

"I want to see who comes out of that house."

"But, my dear Robert, it is nearly two o'clock in the morning!"

Just then the door opened, and Binns, pushing forward, recognised, in the muffled figure that sprang into the vehicle, his old enemy and present patron—Mr. Rupert Dacre. He started forward and would have spoken, but the cab dashed on.

"I thought so!" he cried, as soon as he could gather breath. "I thought so! That villain has been there again!"

Bland was silent this time. The evidence was certainly strong enough, for he believed Cyril to be still in Loamshire.

"What is to be done?" asked Binns, with savage eyes.

They looked up at the house. The lights went out.

"It is no use doing anything now," said Bland. "Let us go home."

"I shall go and see that villain to-morrow," cries Binns. "I'll kill him; d—n him, I'll kill him!"

"I think that the best thing to do is for me to speak to her mother," said Bland.

"You may speak to her mother, but I'll speak to that scoundrel. I'll write to her husband, too. Her *husband*! Oh, Carry, my darling!"

And he began to groan, of course.

Not being acquainted with the fact that private secretaries to ministers are not always attending to their duties at ten o'clock in the morning, Binns called too early. Determined in his purpose, however, he had called again, and marched into Dacre's room eager for combat.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HEAD AGAINST HEART.

DACRE was all smiles.

"Good morning, my dear sir—delighted to see you. I hope that I can be of some service to you."

The cordiality of the reception was embarrassing, and Binns felt it to be so.

"I came here to speak to you in private, Mr. Dacre," said he, and twisted his hat about in his hands.

"We are quite alone—as you see. Pray sit down."

Binns felt his prepared speech deserting him. He waited for the other to speak.

"Is it anything in connection with political matters?"

"No."

Dacre took out a little pearl-handled penknife and began to pare his nails.

"It is rather—a—a delicate matter," stammered Binns, who did not know exactly what to say.

Dacre guessed what it was at once. "The young fool has got suspicious of the Chatteris affair," he thought. "Let us see how he begins."

But poor Binns was in no hurry to begin.

The calm, smiling, self-possessed secretary, seated in state, and quietly paring his aristocratic nails, was a very different man from the midnight intriguer who could be seized under a gas-lamp and attacked at advantage. He shuffled about on his chair.

"I am going to speak to you about—about a very delicate matter," said he.

"So you said before," returned Dacre, without looking up. "Go on."

"I am a friend—an old friend, of Mrs. Chatteris."

Binns looked for a start or a blush at the mention of the name, but he saw none.

Dacre smiled sweetly.

"An *old* friend! Were you children together, then?"

Poor Binns detected the sneer, but he went on bravely.

"I should be very sorry if any harm happened to her, Mr. Dacre."

"So should I indeed—for my friend Chatteris' sake. Do you know of anything wrong then?"

Binns grew red. "I hope not—I only suspect."

Dacre drew his chair closer, with sudden affected interest.

"Good God! what do you mean? She cannot be ill, for I saw her yesterday."

This frank admission was a good thrust.

"She is well enough, I believe—I hope, but—but—"

"Well, speak out."

"I am afraid that she is not happy."

Dacre shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear sir, that is a matter that I fear we cannot remedy. But as far as I am able to judge, the young lady is perfectly happy."

Secure in the consciousness of his ability to defeat his adversary, he did not care to suppress a smile at the thought of Carry's "happiness."

Binns saw it, and was aroused at once.

"Mr. Dacre, you know that is not true!"

Dacre got up. "Look here, Mr. Binns," said he, very slowly; "you are very young and very hot-tempered, and, I think, a little ignorant of the rules of good society. Take care what you say. I will pardon your insolence this once, because I believe it arises from a desire to benefit a friend of yours. Now what is it that you want to say about Mrs. Chatteris?"

This had the effect of a cold bath upon Binns. He was quite prepared to quarrel, but he did not understand the cool, deliberative method of arguing upon questions of feeling, which was affected by men of Dacre's stamp; and, moreover, his *quasi* refinement of intellect made him morbidly fearful of saying or doing vulgar things.

"I did not mean to insult you, sir," he blurted out; "but I am afraid that Carr—that Mrs. Chatteris is left too much alone."

"You should see her husband upon that point, my good boy," said Dacre, with a sneer. "What do you come to me for?"

Binns flushed redder.

"Why, because I believe that you want to ruin her! There!" he burst forth, and rose to his feet, expectant of coming combat.

But Dacre threw himself back in his chair, and laughed hugely. By and by he got himself gradually composed.

"You'll excuse my laughing, but, upon my word, the accusation is too absurd for me to be insulted at it. What put such an idea into your head?"

"I have seen you constantly at the house with her; and I saw you come out of the house last night."

Dacre started. How fortunate matters had turned out as they had done!

"Oh, indeed! So you have been playing the spy upon my actions, have you, Mr. Binns? Creditable occupation, I must say! And upon such evidence as this you come here and insult me, insult my friend Mr. Chatteris, and endeavour to blacken the name of a young—"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Binns; "not that! God knows, I never—"

"Now, look here, my young friend; just listen to me a moment. I am afraid that you are either a very ungrateful boy, or a very silly one. I have been exerting myself for your benefit because I took a fancy to you, and you come up to my rooms with an accusation of this sort. With anybody else I should simply ring the bell, and have him shown downstairs; but as you are—you say—an old friend or acquaintance of my friend's wife, I will reply to your very impertinent questions. I have been a great deal with Mrs. Chatteris, because I am the only one of her husband's friends who knows of his marriage; and I went to the house last night to welcome him home. Are you satisfied!"

Binns did not know what to say. To speak truth, he was not satisfied, but the fact of Cyril's presence disarmed suspicion. He felt bound to apologise.

"I am afraid that I have been too hasty," he said.

"I am afraid that you have indeed," returned Dacre, gravely.

"You are *sure* that Mr. Chatteris was there last night?"

Dacre got up to ring the bell.

Binns understood the motion, and Heart construed it

into the result of insulted virtue. He began to think that he had done Mr. Rupert Dacre a gross injustice.

"Oh! sir, I did not mean that; but you can understand me. I did not know what to think."

Dacre paused a moment with his hand on the bell. The thoughts that ran through his mind in that brief instant were something to the following effect:

"This young man is suspicious. He was in love with the young woman himself I believe once. He is impetuous. Just the sort of young donkey who would insist upon plunging to the bottom of the affair, and making everybody uncomfortable. Now if I can read the young gentleman's character aright, he is warm-hearted and passionate. If I can convince him that he has done me an injustice, that I am in reality a kind, good, honourable man, whom he has cut to the soul by his suspicions, he will be ready to do anything to make amends; I will accept his apologies, mingle my tears with his, and then send him down to Kirkminster out of the way."

It was an excellent device, and he determined to put it into practice. His face assumed a sad expression.

"Mr. Binns," said he, "you have wounded me very deeply. The best of us are apt to have our actions misconstrued, and heaven knows that I am not so far removed from error as to be exempt from reproach, but I confess that in this instance I am very much hurt."

Binns began to grow uneasy.

"Cyril Chatteris is a very dear friend of mine, and I have known his family for years. That I should be thought capable of such an iniquitous action as that of which you imagine me guilty, would give me sufficient pain at any time, but that you should think me capable of betraying the honour of my intimate friend, who had entrusted his wife to my care, I confess has somewhat surprised me," and the tender-hearted fellow sank into a chair, and seemed to struggle with his emotion.

"My dear Mr. Dacre! Sir! I did not mean to wound your feelings, believe me, but the circumstances of the case, the lateness of the hour; all—"

"Ah, yes," said Dacre. "Yes, perhaps you had reason; but you should not have been so hasty. However, now

that matters are explained.—Well—well! There, we will say no more about it.”

The poetic soul of the young grocer’s assistant was touched; he put out his hand. “You will forgive me, Mr. Dacre?”

Rupert never hesitated at small sacrifices. He took the offered hand, and wrung it. “Say no more,” said he. Then, turning over a mass of papers on the table, he pretended to look for something. “I had something to say to you of importance, but this discussion put it out of my head. Where is the thing? Ah! here.” He drew out a letter from a bundle, labelled *private correspondence*.

“Mr. Binns, how would you like to go into Parliament?”

“To go into Parliament?”

“Well, not exactly at once, you know, that would be a little premature; but to put yourself in the way of doing so at some future date.”

Binns’ heart began to thump. What did this mean? Was he about to realise his hopes? “I do not understand you,” he said.

“Well, listen then. You are not rich, I believe; and you have not much political interest?” Dacre laughed inwardly as he asked the question.

Binns saw nothing to laugh at. In his own mediocre mind, he thought that he had a good deal of political interest—that is in the working-man point of view. He replied, however, in the negative.

“Well then,” the other went on, “when a young man has no interest and no money—what must he do? Attach himself to those who have. You have read Vivian Grey?”

“Disraeli’s book? Yes.”

“How would you like to be a Vivian Grey? or, to speak plainer, a Benjamin Disraeli?”

“You are laughing at me, Mr. Dacre.”

“Not I. ‘Adventures are to the adventurous.’ I see no reason why you should not sit in a House which owned John Bright and Benjamin Disraeli for members.”

“But they had money, and power.”

“Just so. Other people have money and power, which they don’t know how to use. It is reserved for you and me, Mr. Binns, to use it for them.”

Poor Binns swallowed all the flattery like a gudgeon.

Dacre opened the letter he held.

"This was received three days ago from Kirkminster. You know the place?"

"Wheales's borough? Yes."

"Well, Wheales's colleague is dead. We are going to contest Wheales's borough, and we want a man well acquainted with the working classes, with the organization of trades unions, and the machinery of working men's associations, to help us to defeat the selfish policy of this blatant knave."

"Mr. Dacre—I am not a spy."

"Impetuous again! No, no, I suppose not. I did not ask you to become one. I want you to assist me, though, in the task of putting the working classes upon their true level. I told you before, the aim of the New Party is to reconcile the conflicting masses, to bring together the *disjecta membra* of society. It is essentially the Party of Mediation. Now, before we can proceed to attack the enemy we must reconnoitre his position, and this is a service that requires a man of peculiar talent, of peculiar experience. You have been working with myself for the interest of the working man; you know his ways, his temper, his idiosyncrasies. Will you go down for us to Kirkminster?"

Binns did not exactly know what to say. He did not comprehend what was required of him, but he did not like to confess his ignorance; he was afraid of acting dishonourably towards the party to which in his own ideas he had pledged himself, but he did not want to disoblige Dacre.

"What will be my duties?"

"Well, that is a question that I scarcely know how to answer. One thing I can readily say—that you will have to do nothing dishonourable in any way."

Binns considered again. Even if he found that his position was a false one, he could return.

"I will go, Mr. Dacre, if you say that."

Dacre drew the blotting pad closer to him.

"I am glad to hear you say so."

And he began to write.

"But about money?" Binns hazarded. "I can leave the sh—the place where I am now, if I like; but I could not afford to go there for nothing."

Dacre smiled.

"Of course not," he said. "We will take care of that. If you will take that note"—and he handed a sealed envelope across the table—"to that address, to-morrow, you will be put in the way at once." He looked at the face of the stolid clock on the black marble mantelshelf. "Now I must say good morning."

Binns rose.

"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness," said he.

"No kindness at all, my dear sir. I am anxious to do what I can to advance your interests, despite your bad opinion of me." And he laughed pleasantly, as if he had quite dismissed from his mind all unpleasant remembrance. "If you should not like to go, you know, let me hear from you to-morrow. But I think that you will find that your interests will be advanced by joining us. Now, good morning once more; and, remember, the part I have taken in this matter is entirely between ourselves. If it was known that the private secretary of a Minister affected the 'working classes,' it would never do."

"Good morning, sir," said Binns. "This conversation shall be strictly private."

As soon as he got outside the door, he looked at the superscription on the letter which he held in his hand.

"JONAS HUSKINSON, ESQ., 5 NEW SQUARE, LINCOLN'S INN."

"Parliamentary agent, I suppose," thought he, and began to whistle.

His fortune was made! He was accredited to the Court of Politics! He had entered the ranks of the chosen. How he longed for the morrow! What a bright world it was! How he had misjudged Mr. Dacre! What a suspicious fool he had been, and how nobly the "aristocrat" had behaved!

In the meantime, Rupert Dacre was washing his white hands carefully, and drying them tenderly upon the softest of Turkey towels, and laughing softly at the recent interview.

"Of all the utter fools I know, that boy is the worst! Poor devil! To think that he—an uneducated grocer or tallow-chandler, or something of that kind—can revolutionise Society! Well, he will serve our purpose, I dare say, and will be kept out of the way."

He looked at himself in the glass, and brushed his beard lovingly.

"You have done a good day's work, my boy," he said. "What an honest, pure-minded fellow you look! How the accusations of the wicked annoy you! You deserve some reward after all your sufferings, and you shall have it. I will take you down to take a quiet cup of tea with Mr. and Mrs. Chatteris. Poor little Binns! A Benjamin Disraeli, eh?" And the idea so tickled him, that little Fitzfeathertop, the fourth clerk, who was in the act of conveying his rickety little person into a Hansom cab, after the fatigues of the day, said to one of his intimates that evening, that he was sure that there was something up with the Governor, for he saw Dacre going home, and the said Dacre "was grinning like a Cheshire cat, beged, sir."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

"TELL me all you know about this fellow Docketter," said Bob to Ponsonby, when the two were comfortably alone.

"I know that he is a most unmitigated scoundrel," says the Major. "The sort of man, sir, that would sell his mother for a five-pound note."

This description was not very encouraging to poor Bob, who had—so to speak—put his fortune into his hands.

"But what am I to do?"

"Well," said the Hon. John, puffing at his cigar with irritating self-complacency, "I don't know, my boy. It appears to me that for a young man—a colt in fact—you have got yourself into as nice a mess as the heart of man could devise."

"Shall I take the horse out of his hands?"

The Major deliberated, with his eyes shut, for some moments. "No," said he, at last. "I wouldn't do that. I know the boy that Docketer has picked up. As arrant a young villain in the matter of horseflesh as could be found in all Newmarket, I believe—but grateful. He told me that the horse was all right. He rode him for Lundy, you know, and I think that as long as you keep him there, you are pretty safe. Though you can never tell," he added, ruefully, "never!"

"Then you advise me to say nothing about it?" asked Bob.

"Precisely—keep your eyes open, that is all. By the way, it's hardly a fair question, but are you in for much?"

"About seven thousand."

He had got used to the sum by this time, and it did not frighten him at all.

Honest Jack Ponsonby started.

"Seven thousand! By Jove, you've put the pot on with a vengeance! Pray, how much did you give for the brute?"

"Two thousand."

The Honourable's lips formed themselves into whistling shape, but he stopped short.

"Cash or bill?"

"Well, it was rather a queer transaction," said Bob, rolling in his seat a little uneasily. "You see, I owed some money."

"Of course—go on."

"And I had got no remittances from home."

"Well?"

"Well—and—well, I went to Dacre to borrow some."

"Didn't get it, of course?" said the Major, parenthetically nodding to Slasher of 'Ours,' who, being engaged to be married, and wishing to write to his ladylove, had crossed the room for a dictionary, to see if 'adore' was spelt with two d's or one.

"Well, no, he hadn't got it, he said. Dacre's a very good fellow, you know, Ponsonby," added Bob, seeing a suspicious twinkle in the other's eye, "and I am sure he would have lent it me if he had it to lend."

"But as he hadn't, he sold you a horse, eh?"

"Oh dear, no!" says poor Bob, delightedly. "He took me down to Ryle's—Charlie Ryle, you know."

"I know," said the Major, and there was a world of significance in his nod.

"Well, Ryle said he hadn't the money, but that he knew a friend of his, a betting man in fact, who lent money, and who might let me have what I wanted."

"How much *did* you want?"

"Well, I'd borrowed fifteen hundred from him before, and he'd paid the bill away, you know, and the people were pressing for payment, so I asked him for two thousand."

"So you'd borrowed fifteen hundred before. Any security?"

"Dacre backed the bill for me, if you mean that."

"Oh! I see. Go on!"

"Well," went on Bob, who began to get a little uneasy at the stolidity of his friend, "you see, that when we got down to the place and saw the horse, and I liked him, and the money wasn't forthcoming, and I was in a fix, don't you see, Ryle said that he'd back *my* bill if I took the horse, just to humour the fellow, you know."

"What fellow?"

"Why, Docketeer."

"WHAT!"

And the Major took his little legs off the chair and nearly swallowed a mouthful of smoke.

"Why, there's nothing extraordinary in that," says Bob, with an odd feeling of foolishness coming over him. "I know lots of fellows in Melbourne lend money like that."

"That's a horse of another colour," said the Honourable. "But go on. How much did you give the bill for?"

"Four thousand pounds."

"And you got the Cardinal and Ryle's cheque for two thousand, I suppose!"

"Yes."

"No pictures?"

"No."

"No wine, nor statuettes, nor old curiosities, nor anything of that sort?"

"What do you mean, Ponsonby?"

The Honourable John laughed. Bob grew uneasy.

"It was all right enough," he said. "I did it myself, you know, of my own free will."

"Yes, that's just the beauty of it!" says the Major, between his paroxysms.

"You don't think I've been done!" cries Bob. "Because I haven't, you know; I think I've got my money's worth in the horse."

The Major suddenly became grave.

"Excuse me laughing, Bob, in this unfeeling way, but, *upon my soul*, you have been plucked as nicely as any fellow I ever knew; Ryle backs Dacre's bill—Ryle lends you money—Ryle takes you to Docketter, and Docketter sells you Ryle's horse."

"Ryle's horse?"

"Yes. Why, everybody knows that Ryle got him from poor old Lundy. I thought you did too."

Bob shook his head dolefully. He was not very vain, but he had some share of vanity, and he was put out of conceit with himself; he was also affectionate and trustful, and he believed in Dacre.

"I see it now," he said, "but I would not have believed it. I know as much about swindling, and so on, as most fellows, but I never suspected any of the fellows one meets here."

This was true. Master Bob was no fool. Indeed, in the matter of horse dealing or cattle buying, he was as sharp as most men, but with the frequenters of the horse-yards he was on his guard. He looked for nothing but honesty and fair dealing from the well-dressed gentlemanly men he met in Dacre's society, and least of all, did he suspect the "good fellow" Dacre to have been so treacherous. He hung his head.

The cheerful Jack saw his confusion, and good humour-edly came to the rescue.

"Never mind, my boy," he said, "most young fellows make mistakes. When you are as old a stager as I am at this sort of game"—and he nodded his trim little head at life generally—"you'll find that it isn't *all* beer and skittles. Come, don't be down-hearted about it. You've

wasted a month or two, and spent some money—that is about all. You boys do rush your fences so, you know. If you'd only take it easy, you'd get on much better. Look at me! Hard as nails,—and yet I've been in the service ever since I left school, and lived the pace all through. But, then, I do the thing by rule of thumb—tub, and walk, and ride, and don't drink hot-stopping, and don't smoke before breakfast, don't you see. What's the consequence? Out of debt,—cheerful as a bird,—and game as a pebble. You go and play old gooseberry with your constitution, you know, pitch your liver to Old Harry, and make ducks and drakes of your nervous system;—why, *bless* my SOUL, you know, you'll be dead in two-two's! You will indeed."

And, exhausted by this long and somewhat incoherent speech, the good-natured little Major drained a fizzing brandy-and-soda at a gulp.

Bob laughed.

"My nervous system's all right, old fellow," said he.

"Not it! You've got an eye like an oyster, but that doesn't matter now. Let's see how much you're in for. You owe two thousand, and you've got seven thousand on the horse—is that it?"

"Yes."

"Well, the two thousand is gone. When's the bill due?"

"Next month."

"Very well. Now what odds have you got about the Cardinal?"

"Pretty long at first, of course; but he's been going up a bit lately."

"Exactly—that's Docketter's doing. What's your average?"

"About 20 to 1, take it all round. I *did* get 100 to 1 at the beginning, you know."

"So that if he wins, by any remote chance, you pocket how much? Twenty sevens is a hundred and forty. Why, by Jove, you'll win a hundred thousand pounds."

"Yes," says Bob, with a watery smile; "but I am afraid he won't win."

"Then you'd better hedge, my boy. It is no use dropping a pot of money over the beast, you know.

Why, by Jove, sir, you could bring up a small family virtuously and happily, and settle down, and breed race horses, upon a hundred thousand pounds!" cries poor Jack (youngest of seven Desboroughs); "you could indeed, you know."

There was something in the sentence which jarred upon Bob's feelings. Settle down! He didn't care to settle down, unless with some one who was not for him, but for Cyril Chatteris. In the pang of the sudden thought he struck the table with his hand.

"No!" he cried; "I won't! I won't hedge a sixpence. The odds are heavy, I know, but I'll run the risk; and if I pull off——"

"You'll never bet again, eh?" says the Major. "Don't say that, old fellow, because you'll break it, you know—you will indeed."

"No, I mean it!" cries Bob, with another blow at an open copy of the *Observer*, and old Martinet, who was drinking sangaree and smoking savagely over the *Bombay Times* at another table, knitted his bushy brows, and sulkily wondered "why, in the deevil's name, Poonsonby was etainally deesputin' with his racin' freens?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A POLITICAL APOSTLE.

MR. JONAS HUSKINSON lived, spider-like, in that web of houses that surrounds Lincoln's Inn. He was by profession a barrister, and had some reputation for the drawing of parliamentary bills. He was mysteriously connected with the Government—that is to say, with the moderate Conservative Ministry, and was a friend of Lord Nantwich when that nobleman was Under Secretary years and years ago. He was reputed wealthy, and lived in Cavendish Square in a big house that smelt of funerals. He was of the middle height, with a blunt, short nose, bare temples, thin, closely-shut mouth, and an eye like a pig—deep set, colourless, and cruel. A staid clerk ushered Binns into the presence of this great man. He read the letter through twice, and then said,

"Are you a friend of Mr. Dacre?"

"Not exactly," said Binns, who, though vain, was honest. "Mr. Dacre heard of me through the Working Men's Association."

"Ah!"

"He said that he wished me to join his party, and——"

"Well?"

"Well," said Binns, as near laughing as he dared, as the thought struck him that that was all Dacre had said, "he told me that you would explain."

"Oh! Are you in any profession?"

Binns flushed a pimply crimson. The hated shop to crush him here again!

"I am going into trade."

"Ah!"

"In fact, I—I—I am about to be made partner in a grocery business."

The little eye twinkled, and Mr. Huskinson meditatively tapped a very fine front tooth with a paper knife.

"You prefer politics, however?"

"Yes."

There was a silence; and, as poor Binns sat upon the edge of his chair, he felt like a rabbit in the presence of a boa-constrictor, and that Mr. Jonas Huskinson was sliming him over with his eye previous to swallowing him noiselessly. Having apparently expended all his mental saliva, Mr. Huskinson changed the *venue* of the paper-knife to the palm of his hand, and said,

"Mr. Dacre says in this letter that you are ready to go down to Kirkminster as an agent for the Conservative interest."

"Not exactly the *Conservative* interest," says Binns.

"What then?"

"Well, the idea was that I should discover the feelings of the working men about there—that is the pottery people—and see if they were favourable to the political views of Mr. Dacre."

Mr. Jonas Huskinson stopped the paper-knife suddenly, and said,

"I beg your pardon; of whom?"

"Of Mr. Dacre."

"Oh yes--ah! Pray, go on."

"Well," says Binns, fairly driven to speak out, "I have come to you for instructions."

Mr. Huskinson struck a hand-bell, which brought the staid clerk to the door, rigidly, as if his room was a cuckoo clock, and he was the cuckoo.

"Bring me 'K,'" said Mr. Huskinson.

"K" turned out to be a huge ledger, brass bound, and locked.

Mr. Huskinson unlocked it, turned over the leaves with a catlike cleanliness, and signalled to Binns to approach.

The first thing that he saw was the word *KIRKMINSTER*, in large letters, then a printed description of the town, cut out of some cyclopædia or gazetteer; and, last of all, an array of names, with remarks appended, in a minute handwriting.

"This," said Mr. Huskinson, blowing away a speck of dust from it, "is a full account of the town of Kirkminster, you see. *Pop.*, 17,000. *Man.*, glass, earthenware, cloth, bricks. *Rivers*, the Kirke, the Axe, and so on. I have also jotted down, for my private information and guidance, any little interesting items of news concerning the county families and the most influential electors in the place. It will be your task, I imagine, to add to such a scanty store as I have collected."

"I do not quite understand you, sir."

Mr. Huskinson shut up "K" and began to slime.

"You are to go down to Kirkminster, Mr. Binns, to find out all you can about the feeling of the working population. Do you understand?"

There seemed to be a diplomatic delicacy about such a mission that fascinated Binns. He would try what he could do, at all events; if he did not like the mission, he could return.

"I am to report progress to you?"

A smile glimmered on one side of Mr. Huskinson's mouth.

"Not exactly. You will find a committee there already, I expect, and you will be guided by their directions. All you have to do is to mingle with the electors, and——"

Binns flushed again. "That is something like a spy," he interrupted.

"Impress upon them the great principles of coalition and temperance."

Binns felt sorry for his haste.

"The object of Mr. Dacre, I expect, is to convince the people that he means good, not harm. Of course, if you should obtain any *important* information—concerning the formation of a clique, for instance, or anything of that sort—you may write to me. But I shall be down there myself when the election comes off. You will want money, of course."

He took out a cheque book, and wrote a cheque, and then a letter.

"Here is a cheque for £20, and here is a letter to Mr. Potter, our agent. He will give you as much more when you want it. If you are extravagant, you will have to come back again. Elections are not what they used to be, you know. You can go by the last train to-night, or the first to-morrow morning, if you like. Good day!" and he handed the cheque and the letter with an indifferent air, as though he had met Binns every day for the last ten years, and was going to meet him again every day for ten more.

Bland was not very sanguine about the wisdom of the proceeding, and shook his head when Binns told him the result of his expedition.

"It is a great risk," said he, "you will have to give up your secretaryship, you know."

"I have got somebody to do the work while I am away."

"Yes. But what do you think will be the end of all this?"

"We must leave that to time, you know," says Binns. "I think Mr. Dacre is an honourable man, and means well."

"I hope he does; but I shall keep an eye upon him for all that."

Binns sighed. "I think we have both been mistaken about Chatteris. It was my fancy—my jealousy, if you like—that made me suspect all sorts of things. I think he loves her."

Strange to say, the two minds seemed to have changed places. Binns was hopeful, and Bland despondent.

However, they shook hands and parted.

"You will let me know if you hear anything?" says Binns.

"Yes, yes; and be careful what you do, my boy."

"Oh, I'll be careful enough!" says Binns, with all the delightful confidence of youth. "Good-bye, old fellow—good-bye;" and he went off as though he were already Prime Minister.

When he reached his destination, however, he did not feel so sanguine.

Mr. Potter was a fat-headed man, with an overweening sense of his own importance. He lived in a staring red brick house in High Street, and wore all the brass about it polished to dazzlement. He was an attorney of the stolid sort, and was very proud of his connection with the Parliamentary Huskinson. The real work of the firm was transacted by Piper—a little black-visaged man, who never looked you straight in the face. Potter grew stolid over his chief's letter, and then sent for Piper. Piper bit his nails to the quick, and said, "Of course—of course—of course," like a magpie. All this time Binns was growing uncomfortable, and thinking about dinner.

"Find out about the public feeling!" says Piper, stealing a vicious side glance at Binns—"Why, we could have told him that. Eh, Potter?"

Potter's forehead veins grew turgid.

"Mr. Huskinson's reasons are always excellent, Piper," said he. "We will give the young man every facility."

The young man, whose best coat was cutting him under the arms, brightened up a little at this.

"You can live at the Angel," said Piper, looking everywhere but at the person he addressed.

"An excellent coffee-room," said Potter, "and reasonable terms."

"Reasonable terms?" says Piper to the inkstand.

"Oh yes, I think so," says Potter.

So, after Piper had concluded a short interview with the fire-irons on the subject of the dullness of London at that time of year, Binns rose to go.

"There will be no business of importance for a week or two," said Mr. Potter. "But I gather from my friend

Mr. Huskinson's letter that he expects you to be of some service in your secretarial capacity."

Binns felt a little confused. He did not understand all this vague talk, out of which nothing arose. He had some dim idea that he should find the task of disseminating the New Political Gospel an entirely different thing from what he had expected. However, he was wise enough to say nothing, and went out.

CHAPTER XL.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

YOUNG FITZFEATHERTOP was partially right in his conjectures. Dacre was on the best possible terms with himself and all the world. Everything was turning out to his advantage—even Binns. He smiled as he thought how nicely he had disposed of that ingenuous youth. "I told Huskinson in my letter to send him down to Potter's people. He will be useful enough, I dare say; and will be kept from prying into business which does not concern him. Piper will soon get the working-men's secrets out of him—if there are any to be got—and then if he becomes troublesome, I can always throw him over. I'll get in for that borough. Capital notion—to go up with my dear Cyril—just as a friend—and then beat him. What a hound the boy is! He deserves no mercy; he shall get none either. If the girl is only his mistress, I'll take her from him; and if she's his wife, I'll marry Miss Ffrench. Perhaps with care I might do both. How ugly all this would look on paper! Somebody says somewhere that a true history of a human heart will never be written. That the best man who ever lived would never dare to put down *all* his thoughts. 'Gad, I should be sorry to put down some of mine—and yet I don't suppose I am much worse than other men of my own stamp. It is a question of temperament after all. So much nervous energy, so much passion; so much imagination, so much poetry; so much absence of moral restraint, so much crime. I wonder if that theory would go down. I'll try it on Chatteris. *Fiat experimentum in corpore vili!*"

He had reached the Pegasus by this time, where he played two games of billiards with Figleaf, won both of them, and then dined complacently. Randon, who sat at the same table, said that "he bub-bub-believed that th-that young f-f-fellow Chatteris was going up for K-K-K-Kirkminster."

"I have some idea of going up with him," says Dacre quietly.

"I'm sorry for you, I own, I fuf-fuf-fwankly own that I *am* s-s-sincerely s-s-sorry f-for you."

"Why so?" asked Figleaf. "I think Dacre's just the man."

"N-n-not at all. D-D-D-acre's a very good secretary, and Fuf-fuf-foreign Office clerk, I've no doubt, but we want men with l-l-l-lul-liberal minds in the House."

"My mind is positively oppressed with liberality," says Dacre laughing.

"No, no—Y-you are t-tut-too aristocratic."

"You ought to go into the House yourself, Randon," grunted old Grosmith, who could not repress the sneer.

"W-well—I ought—I own, I f-f-fwankly own I ought—I *am* a liberal m-m-minded m-man. In adv-v-vance of my age, I own it. F-f-fwankly own it. But then I am lazy, t-t-terribly lazy. T-t-too imaginative. T-t-t-too f-fine a m-mum-mind. My s-sympathies are with N-nature, sir. Bub-bub-bub-bub-Boundless Nature, sir! I own—I f-fwankly own, that I have a p-p-passion for the Bub-bub-beautiful and the Tut-tut-tutter-true!"

"The thing is a sort of secret just at present," said Dacre, who wished it known. "So you need not mention it, you know!" They all promised, and the expectant M.P. mumbled an olive with the pleasant consciousness that the story of his political advancement would be all over town in twenty-four hours.

"I wonder if Nantwich will really form a ministry?" said Figleaf.

"I am *afraid* not," said Dacre. "I hope so, of course."

It was eight o'clock.

"Let us go and see that singing-woman—what's her name?" says Grosmith.

"I have got an engagement," said Dacre.

"I'll c-c-come!" stammered Randon. "I own—I f-fwankly own—I lul-like the *a-b-b-bub-bandon*—the—"

"Very nice," says Dacre, "I dare say—but injurious. Seeing that sort of thing is like drinking absinthe."

"You'd better come too, Millington," said Grosmith.

"Sir," said Lord Millington, who had been driven from his Naples villa, by a heartless husband, and dragged to London as co-respondent in a divorce suit—"I never go to theatres."

"Ah!" said Grosmith, "my morality is not so old-fashioned as your lordship's!"

Figleaf laughed—he was only a *routurier*—and thereby made Millington his deadly enemy for life.

Having thus sown the good seed of report abroad, Dacre turned his steps towards St. John's Wood.

"I expect that there has been a 'scene' after I left," said he, as he got fairly settled in the cab.

So there had been, but not of the kind that he imagined.

Carry awoke in the morning, hot, flushed, and heavy. She did not exactly realise what had taken place at first. There was a weight on her brain, and a strange taste in her mouth. She felt stupid and heavy, and, with an impatient movement of her head, as the light fell upon her eyes, turned round to sleep again. On the instant, however, the remembrance of the events of the previous night flashed across her, and the shock awakened her at once. She looked round bewilderedly. Had Cyril or Rupert (she *thought* of him as Rupert now) quarrelled? She had dismissed her maid and listened at the stair head for any sound of angry words, but she had heard none; and then, unable to bear the suspense, she had taken the laudanum to make her sleep. She must have taken too much, for her head ached and her eyes were hot and heavy. Where was Cyril? Her first impulse was to ring and inquire, but she checked herself. He *might* have gone, and then she would have betrayed herself to the household. No, she must appear unmoved, and unapprehensive. So she dressed, and went down stairs.

It was twelve o'clock. Cyril was lying on the sofa reading. The door was half-opened, and she did not disturb him. She paused to look. His face was white,

and drawn, and there were red flushes under his eyes. He was reading intently. There was something in the bent brows, the compressed mouth, and the firm set muscles of the cheeks, that frightened her. The expression of his face seemed to be a shadow of that hideous look which had stricken the breath and sense out of her the night before.

"Cyril!"

He started up, and, with a strong effort, spoke a welcome.

"Good morning!"

He put the book behind him with one hand, and held out the other to her.

"Cyril, my darling, you are not angry with me, are you? Mr. Dacre was here quite by accident."

"He explained it all to me after you went away."

She breathed freely again.

"Then you are not angry, dear?"

"Angry! no. You may see Mr. Dacre as often as you like. He is a very old friend of mine." He turned away as he spoke, to conceal a crimson flush that would rise in his white face. "In fact, I shall ask him here frequently. You must be lonely when I am away."

Carry felt a terrible thrill of mingled shame and dread. Guiltless though she might be of any actual wrong, she yet knew well enough why her husband's old friend came to visit her. Her woman's instinct had told her long ago that Dacre loved her. She had played with his passion—she thought—played with it to soothe her own wounded feelings and slighted love. Secure in her matronly virtue, she had amused herself by allowing an enamoured aristocrat to believe that she could be induced to break her wifely vows and forget her own honour. That was what she wished to think, but in the bottom of her silly soul, she knew that she had gone too far, and that another step would precipitate her into the abyss.

She had really loved her husband once, and it was his indifference that had piqued her into wrong-doing. If he would love her again, she would confess all, and forget her momentary folly. Last night, when he had

burst in upon her and her lover, she had been nearly rejoicing at the discovery, for she thought that it had brought her errant husband to her feet again. She could have borne all accusations of perfidy; she was prepared for any paroxysm of jealous rage; but this indifferent reception frightened her. One of two things—Cyril either knew his friend's infamy, and cared for his wife so little that he passed that knowledge over in silence; or he did not know it, and was deceived and hoodwinked.

"He knew it when he came in," thought Carry. "I saw it in his eyes," and she shuddered. But the thought was too horrible to be entertained. Dacre had "explained" so skilfully that he was deceived. A pang of shame pierced the woman's heart—shame for her husband. He *was* her husband, her once idol and hero, the first man she had ever loved, and she felt that his degradation would be an insult to herself. Her god had fallen to earth, and the wreaths of love and honour were fast crumbling into dust, but she yet clung to the pedestal, and as yet had erected no fresh image there. She felt that she had a part in the honour of the young man—who, whatever he might be now, had loved her once—and though she felt glad at her escape, she felt that the shame that had fallen upon him had fallen upon her also. Had he seemed suspicious, her fear might have led her to soothe him by lies—as it had an instant since. Had she seen him hot from an altercation with Dacre, and burning with furious rage of jealousy, she might have confessed all and loved him once more. But he was indifferent.

"He must have known," she thought again; and then the horrible baseness of his conduct if he *did* know, made her turn sick with disgust and shame. To deceive a husband was a sort of triumph: to be sold by him was an infamy. She caught his hand.

"Cyril, I want to speak to you."

Cyril, with averted face, laughed. "Go on," he said, between his shut teeth.

"Cyril—listen to me. I have been silly—foolish. I have seen Mr. Dacre too often. I have received him here, alone. I——"

Her husband turned round, and his hand closed upon her's convulsively. His face was white as paper, and his eyes dilated. She knew what he could not ask, and fell on her knees.

"I am innocent, Cyril, before God!" she said.

He looked at her, and knew that she spoke the truth. Then came a revulsion of feeling.

"Don't act," he said. "Of course, you're innocent!" but his voice was husky and thick.

She bowed her head upon his hand.

"Cyril, do not ask that man here—I am afraid of him!" The voice was very low and soft, but he heard it, and shuddered.

"You didn't think I was jealous?" said he, with dry lips. "I know Dacre too well to be jealous."

She raised herself. Her passion had given her perceptive power, and she detected the false ring in the dastard's voice, and the lie smote her like a blow.

"Cyril, why do you treat me like this? You are killing me. I always loved you. You loved me once,—who has stolen your love away from me? I know I was beneath you in rank, but you married me of your own free will, and promised to protect me. You are ashamed of me, perhaps. You knew what and who I was."

He laughed again.

"Curse you—yes—I did know it."

The blood rushed into her face.

"I see what it is—you hate me. You wish me dead, that you may marry your cousin."

His first impulse—beast like—was to strike her to the earth; but civilisation came to his aid, and he stopped. How did she know? Dacre told her nothing; she only guessed. She thought, perhaps, that he was in love; she did not dream of marriage. The suddenness of the shock, and the urgency of the case, gave him the power to dissemble.

"You mean Kate Ffrench, I suppose? Pooh! Why, we were children together. Look here, Carry, your infernal jealousy and folly will make me hate you. You cannot see a man but you think he must be in love with you. You little idiot, do you think that Dacre has got nothing

better to do than make love to you? Go and eat your breakfast, and dry your eyes. Dacre shall come here as often as he likes: he is a very good fellow, and *my friend*."

And as he spoke the last words, he turned away, and left her.

She sat stupidly, poor little woman. All the love was crushed out of her, and in its place was a dull pain of slighted vanity and self-respect. She dried her eyes by and by, and ate something in a tasteless, indifferent way; and then went about her little household cares with a hard, fixed look in her eyes, that made the new housemaid say that she "allus thought missus had a temper of her own, and now she knowed it."

Cyril went into his little study, locked the door, and flung himself into a chair. He sat still for an hour; then two large tears welled up and rolled on to his cheeks. They were the first drops of the storm. He flung himself full length on the floor and wept, biting his coat sleeve, with quivering jaws, to prevent himself screaming aloud. He was prostrated with jealousy, fear and despair. He sprang up and walked about, and then flung himself down again.

"Oh, that I was dead! Kate—Kate, I cannot give you up; you are my life, my soul! I am the most miserable animal on earth. I must get rid of her; I will. I daren't kill her! Murder! My God, I never could do that! She shall go. 'Take her off my hands,' he said. Yes; that is the way. Oh! damn him, the villain! I hate him—hate him—hate him!"

Binns was amply revenged.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

WHEN Dacre entered the little drawing-room he found it empty.

"I will tell Mrs. Carter that you are here, sir," said the trim little housemaid, with an almost imperceptible

toss of the head. With that terrible instinct that with women takes the place of logic, she had divined that it was the wife, not the husband, whom he wished to see Rupert sat down upon the ottoman, and looked round the room. All was familiar to him. The little work-table, the yellow damask chairs, the bird cage, the piano with its scattered wealth of printed melody. Even the water-colours on the walls were old friends. "'Pon my word, it's a very pretty place," he said, and then he walked across to the piano. The song he had requested her to sing the evening before, was open on the music rack, and there was a handkerchief beside it. "She has been playing it again," thought he, and then he took up the handkerchief. It was perfumed with some cheap scent, which offended his finer senses. "Just like your half-bred women," he said, "their taste always fails them in minor details. However, one can't expect perfection."

Then the door opened, and she came in.

She wore a close fitting dress of some shimmering delicately-coloured silk, with no ornaments save a heavy chain of gold (her husband's first gift) coiled round her slender throat. Her face was pale, and though her eyes shone with a steady, unusual lustre, there were dark, bistre shadows underneath them.

"There has been a quarrel, and she has been crying," thought Rupert.

"How do you do, Mr. Dacre?" said she. "I—I did not expect you this evening."

"I thought that I would just look in, to see if you had recovered your equanimity," said he, with a laugh. "Poor Cyril was quite put out last night."

She looked fixedly at him. "What did he say to you after I had gone?" she asked at last.

"Thanked me for taking care of you during his absence."

Carry sat down. "Yes, it was very kind of you. If you had not come to see me, I should have been left quite alone."

There was sufficient provocation in her tone to almost warrant the raising of the eyebrows with which he glanced at the door. "Where is he?"

"I have not seen him since the morning. He is in the study, I think."

"Writing letters?"

"Perhaps," she replied, with assumed indifference, but Dacre saw that his shot had told, and that her jealous heart had suggested Kate Ffrench, her unknown rival, as the recipient of any letters that her husband might choose to write.

Rupert sighed. A very successful sigh. One which he had practised often upon many women. A sigh which meant, "How cruel! Poor girl! *He* does not know her value, and *I* do."

She got up hastily and went to the piano.

"I have been singing your song again."

"Did you think of me then?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him. There was a hard, defiant meaning in their steady glance as she replied,

"Yes, I am always thinking of you."

The words were tender enough, but there was no tenderness in the tone. Had they been spoken by a young girl blushing with radiant shame upon her lover's breast, they would have been but ordinary love-words, forgotten as soon as uttered; but, from a married woman's lips, they meant something more.

Dacre, master of the gamut of shame, comprehended them well. He knew why the eyes were hard, and why the tone rang false; and as, with a triumph in his glance that he cared not to conceal, he took his friend's wife in his arms, he muttered,

"It is not because she loves me, but because she hates him."

At the first touch of his lips she withdrew, as if appalled at her own act, from his fierce embrace; but he caught her hands and forced her to listen. Not being moved by aught save passion, he was able to choose his words and frame his sentences to her melodramatic liking.

"You love me then? Oh! I have hoped for this, and yet struggled against it. Carry, my love, my darling, if you knew what I have suffered when I saw you chained to that cold, calculating boy! You never could have loved him. He has no power to touch a heart like yours. Your affection is too pure, too noble for him to understand. You are a woman fit to shine in any sphere, and

he has condemned you to the obscurity of this place. He despises you. His conceit makes him ashamed of you."

This was just a *little* mistake, and as soon as he had uttered the words he felt it.

She sprang up, crimson with shame.

"Oh, let me go! Rupert—Mr. Dacre, how dare you! Oh! what have I done! I am ashamed of myself. I hate myself, and you! Let me go!"

And she burst into a passion of tears.

Rupert was rather taken aback. Crying must be stopped at all hazards.

"Hush—hush!" he whispered. "Suppose he was to come in and find you like this!"

She stopped for a moment, and then all the flood of her great misery came upon her, and she threw herself upon his breast.

"Oh! Rupert—Rupert, what shall I do? My heart is broken!"

He smiled over her shoulder at the picture which the mirror reflected.

"Don't cry, darling," said he, "but listen. I must speak plainly, for it is but right that you should know the truth. I cannot marry you." She gave a little start, and then clung closer.

"I love you—love you more than any woman I have ever known, and I have known many" (this was a delicate touch that spoke the true artist), "but I cannot marry you—that is as the world calls marriage; but, if a lifetime devoted to you—if the love of all my heart can make you forget that Society prescribes a priest and a prayer-book—you shall forget it."

She sobbed and quivered in his arms, but spoke no word.

"I am not one of those men who lie to a woman," he went on. "I am wicked, and careless, and passionate, perhaps, but I am not cruel. You can never be my wife, Carry."

She shuddered, and then raised her streaming eyes to his.

"I only want to be loved," said she. "Will you love me, Rupert?"

"Always, my darling—always!" he said, and kissed her. His lips were hot, and their fierce caress frightened her.

"Oh, this is madness!" she cried. But he held her close; and, like a bird in the hand of the fowler, she fluttered, and lay still.

By and by, he spoke again.

"You must leave this place."

Her eyes were dry now, and her cheeks brilliant with an unholy red.

"Yes, I will leave it, when you wish."

Rupert reflected rapidly. To tell the truth, he had not expected so easy a triumph, and he was all unprepared.

"I have to go down to Loamshire about my election," he said. "It comes off in a week. We must wait until then."

The thought of living for a week of treacherous shame with the husband she was plotting to deceive was too much for her.

"I cannot stay here," she said, with a shudder.

Rupert, calm in his own selfishness, weighed the question. "What can I do with her?" he thought. "I shall have my hands full during the next week. It is impossible—she must stop." He threw an artificial passion into his voice as he replied,

"My darling, Heaven knows that I would take you away at once, but I cannot. I have many things to settle. I *must* be at Kirkminster. No, no, dearest—you must wait."

"It will kill me. I cannot see him every day. I should go mad."

He smiled.

"He will not be here. He will be down with his cousin at Matcham. Did he not tell you that he also is going up for the borough?"

She shook her head. "He never tells me anything."

"You see you can stop here quite quietly, and you can write to me if you like. It will only be a week, dearest."

"As you wish," said she.

A door opened in the passage, and they started apart.

Cyril came in. He had known that Dacre was with his wife, and had still sat on, persistently alone, his hands clenched and his temples beating heavily. He was tormented with jealousy, and sick with fear. At last he could bear it no longer. He would go in and see how his horrible scheme was progressing.

As he opened the drawing-room door, he took in at a glance his wife's flaming cheeks and dilated eyes. The smiling scoundrel whom he had chosen as the instrument of his own shameful freedom, held out his hand with well-bred ease. For one instant a terrible glance of baffled-beast-like rage shot out from Cyril's haggard eyes. Dacre saw it, and so did Carry. In another second the mental shutter which had flown up came down, and his white face resumed its usual expression. He smiled—a hideous, contorted smile—and took the offered hand.

"He knows it!" thought Carry, and she shuddered with uncontrollable disgust and loathing.

The fingers that Dacre clasped were clammy and cold, and the shifting eyes could not meet his own.

"The curl!" he thought; and such is the strength of habit, that the man who had deliberately planned the seduction of his friend's wife, felt himself actually degraded at the thought that that friend did not interfere.

CHAPTER XLII.

UNDER THE TORTURE.

CYRIL walked over to the window to hide his face. There was an expression in Dacre's eyes that made him cringe with shame. Dacre flung himself into a chair and played with a book—waiting for what should come next. Carry was sitting mute where Dacre had left her, staring straight into space, with bosom heaving. Cyril turned round at last. "How silent you are!" he said. "Have you been quarrelling?"

There was a sickly smile on his face as he asked the question, and he looked down as he spoke. Carry turned crimson, and got up from the sofa.

"Shall I play for you, Mr. Dacre?" she asked.

"Oh—if you would!" said Dacre, and he took up some of the music-sheets that were scattered about the piano.

"What shall we have? The 'Grande Duchesse?'"

"Are you in a reckless mood to-night, then?"

She made no answer, but struck the opening chords defiantly.

Cyril came up and put his hand on his wife's shoulder.

She shrank from the touch, and stopped playing.

"What is the matter?" asked Dacre, ignoring the presence of the husband altogether.

"I don't feel well," said she. "I shall go, I think.

Will you excuse me, Mr. Dacre?"

"You have a headache?" he asked, tenderly.

"I am sick and ill," she said, pettishly. "Good night!"

"Good night!" said Dacre. "I will call and bid you good-bye before I go down to Kirkminster," and he gave a meaning glance.

She stopped at the door and looked with a sort of defiant appeal (if I can use the term) in her eyes.

"I don't like to see people when Cyril is out," she said.

The words were to the friend, but the look was to the husband.

Cyril pressed his uneasy hands together. "You can always see Dacre," he said, and tried to laugh. "We are old friends, are we not?"

Rupert's lip curled with a contemptuous meaning that he cared not to conceal.

"We have known each other a long time," he said.

Carry glanced from one to the other, and, without a word, turned round and left the room.

The two men looked at each other like duellists before they engage. Cyril's eyes fell first; and then an inexpressible feeling of loathing and contempt came into the other's face. But he affected a smile.

"The little woman seems indisposed. Have you been unkind to her, you young rake?"

The tone and words were like the cut of a whip. Cyril writhed under them; Dacre saw it, and smiled savagely. It seemed to him that he was wiping out any disgrace

which might attach to him as the participator in Cyril's infamy, by making his accomplice see the full hideousness of the deed.

"I'll put the matter before him pretty plainly," he thought. "I'll let the young cub see what I think of him, too."

"Suppose we go and smoke?" he said, aloud. "I want a quiet smoke somewhere."

Cyril led the way to the little study. The gas was burning, an open spirit case was on the side-table, and the writing-table was covered with papers, but the chairs were pushed away from it. Dacre's quick eye noticed that the furniture was all displaced, so as to leave a clear passage up and down the room. He remembered an old habit of Cyril's—that of pacing up and down ("walking the quarter-deck," Kate used to call it) while thinking. He took a cigar from the box on the mantelsheff, and flung himself upon the sofa.

"So, you've been thinking it out, have you?" he said.

"What do you mean?" says the other, filling out brandy with a shaking hand.

"About the woman upstairs. What are you going to do with her? She is not bad-looking, but a little vulgar. However, she sings and-plays well, and has a lively manner. She might go on the stage."

Cyril lay back in the shadow and glared at him.

"But then, she is timid, and has no experience. I don't believe in your 'inspired novices,' as Quantox calls them. No, I'm afraid the stage won't do. You must get rid of her somehow, though. This brandy's rather good. Martell, isn't it? The only way I see, is to get somebody to take her, and upon my soul I don't know who will. There's Pierrepont, but he's going to get married, I hear. Gablentz has got some mysterious Greek that 'looks like an angel, and talks like poor Poll,' to parody what's his name, and Randon has a virtuous attachment to a married woman. I'm afraid that Shetland's too young, and Twistleton's got no money. Do you get these weeds from Hudson? I don't like 'em so well as the last you had."

Cyril, gnawing his nails, and grinding his teeth, could

endure no more. He leapt to his feet, with some intention of blows, but the cool, steady glance of the other disarmed him. He finished the tumbler of brandy at a gulp.

"What a cold-blooded devil you are!" he said.

The agony, rage, and impotence of despair in the tone was so great, that even Dacre felt some pang of pity. It soon passed though.

"You fool!" he said. "Why, you want to get rid of her, don't you?"

"Yes—but—"

"But you don't like the matter put in plain words. I thought that you didn't care about her any longer."

"I don't care about her; but——"

"Well, hang me if I can understand you. You deliberately seduce a woman—in a very ingenious, clever way, I admit;—you engage yourself to be married to a young lady; and you then can't find it in your heart to part with your mistress. You can't keep two establishments, you know. You can't marry Miss Ffrench, and keep this woman here."

This dagger was double-edged, and Dacre watched to see the effect of the stab.

Cyril drew himself bolt upright suddenly, as if he had been shot through the heart. Why should he suffer this? He loved his cousin better than any woman, and he shuddered to hear her name upon Dacre's lips.

"Never mind Miss Ffrench!" he cried. "We can leave her name alone, I suppose?"

"Of course. But, my dear Cyril, while speaking of Miss Ffrench with the deepest respect, permit me to tell you that there are occasions in life in which a man *must* look matters fairly in the face. You have been living in this fool's paradise so long that you have lost vital energy. You must give up this girl, and unless you can afford to settle money on her, and all that, the only way you can do it is in the method I suggest. A man with your limited income cannot afford to serve God and Mammon, you know. If you love this girl better than Miss Ffrench, don't marry. If you marry Miss Ffrench, you must give up this girl. That is the question you have to decide."

That was the question that Cyril had been attempting to decide, and had been groaning and cursing, and weeping tears of blood over. It was a dilemma. He was married to a woman he hated, engaged to a woman he loved. He had it in his power to get rid of the one, and obtain the other; but the terrible fact of marriage stared him in the face. Could he be a party to his own dishonour? He was too cowardly to face the consequences of his crime. His vanity made him tremble at the act he was about to do, but his selfishness urged him to commit it. If he only dared to tell the truth!

"But she is my wife," he sobbed out.

"WHAT?"

The tone revealed a world of shame, infamy, ridicule, in one lightning flash.

"—In—in the sight of God."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the other, seemingly relieved from surprise. "That is the sort of rubbish to talk to milliner girls. The legal view of the question is the one for you to take. If you don't want this young woman turning up at the church door, and storming the breakfast-table, or weeping on the door-step, you must get rid of her before your marriage takes place. God bless my soul, why, it's done every day! Do you love the girl?"

"I *hate* her!" says Cyril, in a smothered voice.

Dacre smiled to himself, and took a refreshing puff at the maligned cigar.

"Very well, then, get rid of her. If the girl was your wife, I could understand your scruples; because, to be willing to throw one's wife into temptation is the act of a despicable scoundrel——"

Their eyes met, and Dacre's glance was meaningfully unconscious. Cyril gripped his chair-arm hard, and set himself to listen.

"No gentleman—no Man, indeed—would do such a thing. Absolutely, you know, I don't see much difference, because I regard the ceremony of marriage as a mere legal convenience; but still the world has chosen to think differently, and popular opinion has always considered the man who sells his wife as a degraded and infamous hound."

Cyril clenched his hands till the nails bit the flesh.

"One would think that you intended to insinuate that I was selling *my* wife," he said.

Dacre laughed.

"No, I don't think that you are so bad as that."

You see, it was not his game to disclose how much he did know, because he would then turn an obligation—or at worst a social *lache*—into a crime.

"Because," says Cyril, "I'm not married, you know."

With what a hang-dog look he said it! But it was needful that he should deny to save his honour, and obtain his end.

"Well now, my dear boy," says Dacre, "what will you do?"

"I don't know," says Cyril, savagely; "I've thought over the thing until I'm nearly mad. Curse the woman! I wish I had never seen her. Oh, what a fool I am!"

And he flung his outstretched arms over the table in utter abandonment.

His friend watched him for a minute with a sardonic smile.

"Bad blood all through," he said to himself. "He hasn't got pluck enough to commit a crime—the cur!" Then aloud,

"Look here, Cyril, your nerves are queer; you've been drinking too much, I expect. Go to bed quietly, and get a good night's rest. Tell the little woman that you are going down to Loamshire, and just leave her alone for another fortnight. The election will be over by that time, and you will have got the worry of it off your mind. Then we can consult again about the matter."

Here was a gleam of hope. Here was a chance of temporary escape. Yes, he would go down to Matcham and see Kate, and look after his election. She could get on very well alone—he did not care to think how, and he would be freed from the horrible incubus which weighed upon him. He rose and dashed the hair out of his eyes.

"Yes, I'll go down to-morrow."

"I shall be down in a day or two myself," said Dacre. "I am going up with you. Nantwich thought it best, because they will be bound to return one of us."

Cyril heard, but he didn't pay much attention to the full meaning of the sentence.

"Good-bye, then," he said, and held out his hand.

But Mr. Dacre was so busy looking for his hat and gloves that he did not see it, and only nodded an adieu.

Cyril remained standing until he heard the door slam, and then he raised the hand that Dacre had refused to take, and struck it savagely against the table by his side, until it was bruised and bloody.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

KATE was unhappy. It was strange, so she said to herself, that she should be so, for was she not engaged to be married to her first love, to her hero, her incarnation of all that was good and clever? But, somehow or other, it seemed that her hero was less heroic than of yore. He was not so poetical or so tender. He was, on the contrary, practical and a little ill-tempered. Poor Kate could not understand it. It seemed an age ago since she first found out that she loved Cyril; and the weeks of dull pain and hopeless sorrow which she had lived through when he had quarrelled with his father and gone, no one knew where, seemed to be years distant. From that time he had changed. He was no longer high-spirited, and brilliant, and witty, but cynical, and selfish and silent. Yet she had seen no other man she cared for, save, perhaps, that frank young Australian, who had so startled her by his wooing—and she had worshipped the image of the boy who had left her to make a name at college and astonish the world, and would not confess to herself that such a boy existed no longer, but that in his place was a sullen, down-looking young man, who was nervously impatient of all save his own pleasures.

There was a picture of Cyril hanging in one of the breakfast rooms—a little water-colour, taken when he was a child—and Kate would go in quietly and look at it, and strive to trace some resemblance to her lover in the fair, effeminate, golden-haired boy, that, radiant with youth and health, laughed at her from out his golden frame.

But the attempt was unsuccessful, and she would turn away to check the sigh that would come, despite all her efforts. To put matters into plain English, Kate was becoming disenchanted. Her cousin had been away from her so long that she had not noticed the terrible change that had taken place in him, until they were once more thrown together, and then the sudden knowledge frightened her. But she fought bravely against the fear that was coming over her—fear that she had made a mistake, and did not love her promised husband after all. Such a thought was treason to her lover, she said, and put it back horror-stricken; but still it returned again and again, and she could not repress an unaccountable aversion which sometimes stole over her when Cyril kissed her lips.

He loved her, she did not doubt that. She could see it in his white face, that looked so worn lately—in his restless eyes, that followed her wherever she went—could feel it in his hot kisses, and hear it in his passionate words. Once, when she was singing some song about lovers parting or dying, she was surprised to hear a sudden sob from the man behind her, and to find that his head was bent, and the tears were rolling down between his thin fingers.

“What is it, Cyril?” she asked.

“I was thinking of losing you, my darling,” he cried, and caught her to his heart with shaking hands.

She was terrified at these fits of passion. There was something repellant about them. Love should be tender and chaste, not hot and vehement like this. She asked him once if he had any trouble on his mind, but his denial was so fierce and suspicious that she shrank back terrified. Had she possessed a mother, a sister, or a female friend even, in whom she could have confided, she might have poured out her doubts and fears, and reasoned them away; but she was alone.

Lady Loughborough was not the sort of *confidante* that an enthusiastic girl like Kate would choose, and there were no womenkind of her own age with whom she could associate. Matcham had always been a lonely house. It had been more so than ever since the death of the eldest-born. Saville Chatteris had no sympathy with young

people, and Lady Loughborough was in a chronic state of ill-health;—French novel, repose, hot negus, and fire in bed-room at all seasons. Consequently there was not much “society” or companionship for Kate. There were desperate dinners that took place monthly, at which Saville diplomatically presided, and to which the county people came. But these dinners were dull enough; the county people having such wonderfully good blood, that it seemed to congeal in their veins like attar-of-roses. To be sure all these people were very good, and well-disposed, and thoroughly eligible for friendship, but Kate did not care about them. The daughters of the various Houses round about came to visit her, but she had no *friends* among them. So she rode about, and walked about, and went to Kirkminster with only the old groom for protection, and the county blood thought her a “strange girl,” and a little “fast.” However, that did not matter so much, as “fastness” was fashionable. (Do we not remember how pleased Lady Oriel’s daughter was, at being mistaken in the *Bois* for a certain Madlle. Coccodé, who was at that time regnant in the *demi-monde*—that “one half-world,” where “nature seems dead” indeed? And yet Lady Oriel, and her daughter, too, are the most virtuous of women.)

The young men who came over from the barracks with Fred were few and far between, and when they did come, Kate did not see much of them. Colonel Brentwood she liked well enough, but Saville Chatteris, who had been at Eton with him, and knew of his little peccadilloes since, did not encourage the visits of that gallant officer, and Brentwood was too well-bred to hint at an intrusion. Since Fred had gone, there had been no one at the house, and Kate was quite alone. So she locked up her secret in her own heart, and told nobody. But in her girlish mirror the figure of the rejected Bob Calverly would often rise unbidden and blur the reflection of the promised lover that should have been singly there.

I do not know if I can make you understand the character of this girl, reader, as I wish you to understand it. It is a difficult cipher to read: the more difficult because it looks so simple. I doubt if I can interpret

it to you aright. It needed a little child, they say, to grasp the divining-rod whose turning fork should write the sought-for oracle upon the sand. In any hands less pure the wand might flicker, turn, and shake, but the characters it traced were all uncertain and illegible. Who can interpret aright the strange riddle of a young girl's heart? In our fancied wisdom we laugh at the task. Has not our knowledge of Evil taught us to read womankind? Perhaps; but let us be sure that in gazing into that fiery furnace of sin, misery, and death, from which we draw the materials of our wicked wit and cynical wisdom, that our scorched eyes, dimmed by the tear-compelled glare of the fire, are not rendered incapable of seeing clearly in that cool, dim twilight that reigns around the holy altar of a pure woman's soul.

I can tell you no more about Kate than that she was young and pure; that she loved and doubted, hoped and feared, in a breath. She did not know her own heart perhaps, poor child; and had thought she had given her love when she had only given her liking. But as yet she thought in whispers.

As for Cyril, I think I should not be far wrong if I said that the week which he spent at Matcham at this time was the happiest of his life. He was like the wretch who, under the torments of the Inquisition, told the sneering priest that he "thanked him for making death so sweet." The very agony of his torture rendered the simple cessation from pain a pleasure more keen than he had ever experienced. He was weak by nature. With him to be out of sight was to be out of mind; and when he was free of the detested presence of the woman he hated, he could forget her; when he was out of the house where Dacre had taunted and jeered at him, he could forget that he was a liar and a scoundrel. The struggle he had gone through was too much for him, and his nerves—never very strong—had given way, and he felt prostrated by a reaction that was almost pleasurable. The desperate battle with the breakers had only exhausted him; once carried over the rocks into the deep, still pool, he let himself sink without an effort. Moreover, he was happy in the sympathy of his cousin. It mattered not that his mental agony had arisen from

his own vile and detestable cowardice; she did not know that, and her caresses were as purely sweet as if he had been a saint and hero. He was as sore at heart with the tumult of his own evil passions as if he had been the noblest martyr that ever crowned a life of poverty and persecution by an ignominious and bloody death; and the healing balm of a good woman's tenderness was as cooling to his burning wounds as if he had got his hurts fighting in fair field for a righteous cause.

So when he turned his back on the little cottage in St. John's Wood, and got fairly on his way to the woods and glades of Matcham, to his respectful tenantry and his promised bride, the burden, if it did not fall off altogether, grew lighter and less irksome. He was busied too with election matters. There were speeches to make, and yeomen to call upon, and friends to influence; and he had no time for misery. His father was in high glee at the prospect, and made sure of his son's success.

"Dacre's only here as a blind," said the old man.

"He said so, did he?"

"Of course. A very old and wellknown trick. You see, Cyril, that the Government want the borough, and don't care much who gets it, so long as it isn't one of the other side. I think we are safe enough. Dacre has told me himself that he only came down by Nantwich's request. Sir John Ellesmere (that married his sister, you know) offered to use his interest for him in Wurzelshire, but he wouldn't have it."

"He said that he would have been beaten," said Cyril.

"Perhaps he might have been, for old Sir John is getting a little feeble by this time, and takes rather old-fashioned views of things. (What a beautiful girl Blanche Dacre was when he married her! Only twenty-two; an excellent match for her, though, poor thing, for she had no fortune.) However, the offer was made, I know. But that is a matter of no moment. You are safe as far as regards Dacre. He has his own cards to play. If I have any knowledge of human nature sir,"—here he drew himself up, for knowledge of human nature was his weak point,—“you will see your friend Dacre one day in a very high position, very high indeed. He is one of the cleverest fellows I know. We

will have him down here when you have got in, and he shall drink your health."

This was at the dinner table. Cyril tried hard to retain his composure, but the quick eyes of Kate detected something amiss.

"I don't like Mr. Dacre," she said.

"Oh, pooh, nonsense, my dear," returned the old gentleman, loftily. "A most talented, well conducted young man."

"And such an agreeable companion," said Lady Loughborough. "He always seems to know everything a day before anybody else. Do you remember, Kate, it was he that first found out that unfortunate marriage of poor Fairfax's son. What was the creature, a dairymaid, or a cook, or something of that sort?"

Cyril wished the earth would swallow Lady Loughborough, and frowned unconsciously.

"I think that he used to invent those stories sometimes," said Kate. "But I remember the one you mean. But it was Nellie's governess that he married, aunt, not the cook!" and she laughed merrily.

"Oh, the governess, was it!" said the dowager, indifferently. "It was something of that sort, I know."

"My dear Sybilla," says old Saville, who was a gentleman to his finger nails, "Captain Fairfax's wife was a most estimable and admirable person. She accompanied her husband to India when he exchanged, and was at Lucknow with him during the mutiny. Bellingham told me that the men worshipped her, and that when she died after the Relief, there was not a dry eye in the regiment." And the brave old fellow took off a glass of claret as if in silent libation to the memory of poor little Lucy Smith, the drawing-master's daughter, whom dashing, devil-may-care Harry Fairfax suddenly married out of his sister's school-room, to the amusement of all London, and the wrath, terror, and amazement of the whole of his aristocratic connections.

Lady Loughborough turned down the corners of her mouth at the rebuke; and Cyril felt a knot rise in his throat as the thought flashed across him that perhaps his father was not so terribly proud after all, and would not

have discarded him altogether had he dared to speak the truth.

But the time was gone by now. He had chosen his course, and would abide by it.

So the time drew on towards that eventful day which should decide the fate of Kirkminster.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE EARTHEN POT.

THE White Hart at Kirkminster was in a bustle. A telegram had come down from Mr. Rupert Dacre to begin the battle, and the opposition committees had taken up arms. The late member—a radical manufacturer, who was Wheales's tool and admirer—had been comfortably buried long ago, and Wheales and his party had sent down another candidate in his stead. The new man was a wool-stapler—hard headed, vulgar, and wealthy. If money could purchase him a seat in the House, he would not spare it.

The Conservative Committee was sitting at the White Hart, with Potter and Piper in attendance. The Parliamentary Huskinson had sent down word that the Government would support Mr. Cyril Chatteris, of Matcham, and that Mr. Rupert Dacre would also stand, to make assurance doubly sure.

"I suppose that Dacre is the man they want," said Piper, when the two were in consultation.

"I don't think that they care much," says Potter. "But Huskinson says that we *must* return one of them. The plan is to divide the interest until the last minute, and then put in the most popular man."

In the meantime the town was blazing with placards, and volcanic with eruption of hand-bills. Old Saville paid visits to all the county interest, and had obtained promises without end. The wool-stapler—by name Ebenezer Crofts—held his court at the Potter's Arms, in the New Town, and made dogmatic speeches to the people.

Binns had been set to work to collect facts, and had

collected that the general tone of the pottery-hands was dead against Rupert Dacre. They were not so antagonistic to Chatteris, because the name was to some extent familiar to them, and they could say nothing against him save that he was a gentleman. But the wool-stapler was the favourite. In the Old Town, of course, Crofts was quite out of the race, and Cyril Chatteris was the chosen of Respectability. Dacre's chance seemed a poor one. But Huskinson, who held the electoral strings in his hand, had told Lord Nantwich that he would return his *protégé* if he wished it. Nantwich—cautious ever—said that he thought Mr. Dacre was a safe man, and that he had claims upon him, but that if the agent saw that Chatteris would get in without much difficulty to let him do it.

Consequently, when Dacre arrived he did not find his prospects so bright as he had expected. But Nantwich had promised him that he would not forget him in any case, and his mind was tolerably easy. The morning after he had arrived he sent for Binns. Binns was chap-fallen.

"I don't like the work, Mr. Dacre," he said. "It is underhand and disagreeable."

Dacre, who being secure of his prey, cared little now for Binns' interference, said that it was the sort of thing that must be done by somebody, and that, if he objected, Potter could find someone else. "You have done all we wanted, I fancy, already," said he. "You say that the pottery hands don't like me, eh?"

"No—they do not. I have been among them a good deal, and they seem more inclined for Crofts than anybody."

"Did they know that you had been connected with the Association?"

"No," said Binns, and blushed a little.

"Well, there is no harm done, you see."

"And no good."

"That remains to be seen. It is the wish of the Government that either Mr. Chatteris or myself should represent the borough, and if you further their wishes, I don't suppose they will forget it."

"Mr. Dacre—that looks to me very like a bribe."

Dacre pointed out of the open window into the street, where a knot of the pottery hands had collected.

"Look at them," he said.

Binns looked. At the opposite corner was a public-house. Some ten men were gathered round the steps—smoking, lounging, and talking. It was market day, and the town was full of farmers come to hire, and farm labourers come to be hired. One of these last was leading a big-boned blood horse up and down, while Farmer Giles, or Jones, was absorbing beer at the White Hart bar. The contrast was sufficiently great. The rustic was a big stout-built animal, with huge boots and brawny shoulders. He looked the incarnation of solid strength. The pottery men were shambling, ungainly, sodden-faced fellows, and their attitudes all betokened laziness and debauchery. Binns was not familiar enough with the "British Agriculturalist" to rate him at his true value. He saw only the beery, tobacco-smoking crew on the one hand, and the sturdy holder of the pawing horse on the other.

"Which do you like the best?" asked Dacre—amusing himself by watching the other's face. "There are your masses, and here are your people."

The distinction was fallaciously subtle.

"You are a democrat, you say," he went on. "Very well, here is the raw material—work it up. Which would you rather make ruler or judge over you?"

"King Log and King Stork," said the friend of the metaphorical Bland.

"Exactly. You want to get rid of the present system of government, but you have no other to put in its place. Fancy being ruled over by that fellow!" he added, as a pottery-hand staggered across the road, singing some drunken ditty.

"I don't want him to rule over me, but I want him to know that he has an interest in the government as well as other people," says Binns, plucking up courage as the recollection of his oft-made speeches flashed across him.

"That is what we want to teach him. Do you think that Ebenezer Crofts will do it?"

"No."

"Do you think that Ebenezer Crofts—the wool-stapler, the money-grubber—cares about Hodge yonder? He will

promise enough, of course. What has Wheales done? Excited the people and made himself the laughing-stock of England. The best friend to the English people is the aristocrat after all. He can afford to do practical good." Dacre was getting quite interested in the subject. "If ever the people rise against the nobility, we'll put them down with the shoeblack-brigade."

Binns did not reply. He felt that all this talk was chaff and dry dust, but he was unable to say why he felt it to be so. His mediocre intellect just allowed him to see the disease, but he did not know enough of political surgery to suggest a remedy.

"The prop of England," said he, "is her peasantry."

Just then Farmer Giles or Jones came out, burly, breeched, and booted. He swung himself to saddle, and flung Hodge a sixpence. The coin fell into the kennel, and the plunging hoofs of the farmer's hunter splashed the water into Hodge's face. He looked up and down the street, shook a brawny fist at the retreating figure, and with a bacon-fed curse that made the ears of the town-bred grocer's lad tingle, picked up the money, and went straight into the public-house.

Binns turned away from the window, and Dacre laughed softly.

"You have too romantic ideas about the peasantry," he said.

"There must be something wrong somewhere," says poor Binns, vaguely.

"It will take wiser men than you or I to find it out I expect. And now I must really say good morning. I have to receive a deputation at half-past eleven, and it is nearly eleven now."

Binns paused with his hand upon the door.

"But—but—what am I to do?" he asked.

The expectant member for Kirkminster shrugged his shoulders.

"Upon my word, I don't know. You had better ask Potter; but then you say that you don't like Potter."

The tone was so careless that Binns felt his heart sink. It was true! They did not want him any more. He had kicked against the pricks and must take the consequences.

He felt very heart-sick at his hopes of fame and fortune ending thus; and, almost in spite of himself, made one more effort to retrieve his position.

"Mr. Potter said something about some 'secretarial' work," said he.

"Indeed. Well, you'd better see Potter then. I shall be very glad to do all I can for you." Then, seeing the other's crestfallen look, "You see, Mr. Binns, that politics are a trade as much as anything else. If we don't want an article, we can't afford to pay for it. You have been very useful to us up to a certain point, but we have now got beyond that point—or rather Potter has. I never interfere in these matters of detail myself; but, as I said before, if my name is of any avail with Potter——"

Binns got angry.

"You sent me down here yourself, Mr. Dacre."

"Yes, my good sir; but I am not responsible for your proceedings afterwards. I sent you to Huskinson. Huskinson sent you to Potter. Potter finds that you have done all that can be done, and of course cannot employ you farther."

"In some other capacity——?" ventured Binns.

"Well, I'll see Potter if you like," returned the other, a little impatiently.

And then it suddenly struck him that the young man might be useful in relieving him of some of the multifarious correspondence which his position entailed. Moreover, Dacre was not inclined to bruise broken reeds, and was rather good-natured when he could be so without injury to himself, and poor Binns had been treated somewhat badly.

"I'll tell you what," he said; "you can stop here if you like, and answer some of my letters for me, and we'll see then what Potter says."

Binns overflowed with gratitude. He would be too happy to do anything that lay in his power.

Dacre was sure of it, but the deputation was within ten minutes or so, and Binns could return in the afternoon.

The long, low bar-room was full of people, and the "deputation" were forcing their way through. They were fat, rosy, sturdy men of the yeoman sort, and had come

to ask some questions about malt or hops, or wheat or flour. Binns pushed past them, and went out into the street. He wanted to walk somewhere. To cool his mind in some shady solitude. As he walked up the flags depression began to fall on him. He felt that he had been "made use of;" that the unscrupulous Huskinson had employed him to extract information out of the "pottery people," which could scarcely have been obtained by other means, and had then calmly let him drift away with the tide. He did not like the business from the first, but he had trusted to his own skill and "knowledge of the world" to steer him safely through all dangers. He blushed again as he remembered how he had gradually slipped away from virtue. When first he mingled with the "pottery hands," he had refrained from spying out their secrets and questioning them as to their intentions; but by and by, as Piper puffed complaint concerning "no information," "waste of time," and so on, he had been led into obtaining their "confidences and betraying them." He knew well that the voters in the New Town were noted and marked down, and that Piper and Potter could pretty well guess how many votes would be recorded for the pet Government candidate; and he felt a pang of shame when he remembered that he had himself supplied the information. And yet there was no acknowledgment of his services. To speak them aloud was to proclaim his own baseness. Potter and Piper had "used him," and despised him; and, as for the great Huskinson, he would blow him from his memory as he had blown away the speck of dust that rested upon the immaculate pages of his brass-bound ledger. This sort of thing was base, unmanly, unworthy of a friend of the people and a supporter of the "working man." He would go back to London, admit his errors, and settle down to honest work. Better the grocer's shop than this. It was the old story of the earthen pot.

"I am not clever enough for this sort of thing," said he, bitterly. "I have been made a fool of, and duped, and laughed at. I'll go back and tell Dacre that I won't accept his offer;" and the memory of his old hopes came upon him, and a lump rose in his throat, and his eyes filled with tears of anger and shame.

He had got out of the town by this time, and was on the country road winding far away into the level distance. On the right rose the cathedral with its clustering parasites of cloister, court, and close. Beyond and behind its grey, mournful towers, the tall *parvenu* chimneys of the New Town smoked and puffed in all the insolence of wealth. The struggle between Beauty and Utility modelled in stone. The glaring white houses and hard, jealous villas of the New Town princes dotted the expanse. The railway viaduct spanned the blackened, sluggish Axe, and seven times a day trains ran roaring and rattling past the tawdry poverty and stuccoed cheapness of the New Town tradesmen and hucksters. Binns turned his face to the left. There the country spread out bright and fair; the Axe ran murmuring through locks and weirs, swirled black and gloomy under the branches by Matcham Reach (ghost haunted), and glided broad and bright past the stately trees and sloping branches of Matcham Park. As far as the eye could see, the fair levels of the champaign spread out fat and fertile. A tender, blue wreath of smoke marked here and there a cottage, and through an opening in the trees the slight spire of Matcham church sprang upwards to the pure sky. Matcham Woods rolled away to right and left, and in the midst of their bosky depths a gleam of sunshine fell upon the sharp gables of the old house itself.

Binns looked at the fair landscape and sighed. That was *his* home! There lay the broad acres of the young man who, like wicked Dives of old story, had stolen the little ewe-lamb from his poorer brother.

There came the clatter of horses' hoofs behind him, and turning round, Binns saw his rival of old days. He was riding by the side of a young girl. The spring breezes had blown back a curl or two from beneath her hat and had given a shade of colour to her pale pure cheeks. Cyril was not speaking to her. His face was white, worn, and haggard, and his eyes wandered uneasily from side to side. He saw Binns, and started. The young grocer instinctively raised his hat, and the girl by Cyril's side bent her fair head—carelessly—as though such salutes were customary and expected. Cyril flushed, and turned away his face.

Some vague terror seemed to strike the boy. Strangely enough, the sight of this fair, young unknown brought back to him all the suspicious terrors, fears, that he had so sedulously banished.

The little cavalcade swept past, and as the back of the following pad-groom disappeared round a turn of the road, Binns went up to an old man who was breaking stones under the hedgerow.

"Who is that?" he asked.

The old fellow looked up wonderingly.

"Mr. Cyril Chatteris, of Matcham."

"I know *him*,—but the young lady?"

"Why, Miss Ffrench—God bless her! Mr. Chatteris's niece. They be cousins," and he fell to cracking his lumps of granite again, sulkily.

Binns walked slowly homewards. "His cousin." Natural enough that they should ride out together. Natural enough, too, that Cyril Chatteris should be at Kirkminster. Yet why was poor Carry left to pine alone and unfriended? Binns decided that he would write to Bland, and ask that trusty friend's opinion on the matter.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BLOW FALLS.

I PASS over a week of election-battling. Elections have been described so often, that the description wearies, and Kirkminster election differed little in its details from any other.

Binns, installed as the private secretary, so to speak, of Mr. Rupert Dacre, had been hard at work. This defection from the ranks of the "people" had given rise to some little comment among the few who had noticed that the "young man from London" had originally appeared upon the scene of strife in a somewhat different character, but such defections were common enough, and Binns had been too cautious in his proceedings to make himself noticeable. A few of the leading men in the New Town party had remarked upon it, but they laid the matter

little to heart, not considering such defection of much moment. Perhaps only Piper and Potter knew how useful the young man had been, and they kept their own counsel. The political aspirations of a boy like Binns troubled them but little, and even the Parliamentary Huskinson, who had come down to superintend the deploying of his forces, only knew that the protégé of the pet Government candidate had done his work satisfactorily. He had been recommended by Dacre as a fit person for such dirty work as had been needed, and the fact of his now being chief aide-de-camp to his master, was natural enough. Huskinson was too familiar with the customs of elections to wonder at any baseness, least of all at such a venial dereliction from the strict path of honesty as this. He knew that Binns had been once an *employé* on the other side, but the boy was young and insignificant, and might be reasonably supposed to change his opinions for money or self-interest.

But Binns himself felt degraded and uncomfortable. He knew that he had sold his party—such as it was—for a shadow of political power; that he had yielded to the first temptation, and had been false to his own principles. He was oppressed with shame at what he had done, even though the real facts were unknown to all save himself. He could never again go back to his old friends. He would not if he could. In accepting Dacre's offer, he had severed the tie that bound him to the "working man," and was now adrift upon a treacherous sea of political intrigue. He knew as well as possible now, that all his hopes and aspirations were gone for ever. He knew as well as possible, that, whatever the issue of the election might be, he would be cast off by the men he had served, without remorse. His eyes had been opened, and he had realised his true position. He knew now that his dreams of political success and political power were simply ridiculous, and that the blandly smiling secretary to Lord Nantwich had thought so from the first. He had rushed, in his blind folly and conceit, into the snare that had been laid for him, and Dacre had worked upon his vanity and ignorance to make him a tool for his own ends. His first impulse was to go home, and

sin no more; to confess his defeat, and address himself to the real business of life. The shop that he had despised was the proper place for him, and he would go back there. But the sight he had seen in the lane had changed his intentions. He could not tell why, but he felt that some peril was hanging over the woman whom his plebeian heart still worshipped, and that to remain at Kirkminster was the only way to help her. Poor Binns! He was only a grocer's lad; a foolish, vain, half-educated boy, whose mediocre intellect had been urged on by indiscriminate reading and insufficient education to attempt tasks beyond it. He was just clever enough to make him "attempt." The cheap press has given birth to many like him, and their puny efforts to become great men are more pitiable than ludicrous. Binns was disillusioned. The events of the last few months had opened his eyes, and he knew now that, though by study and labour he might become something greater than nature and fortune had made him, he could never hope to reach those shining heights of fame and honour, where walked the elect of the earth. He remembered Bland's wild burst of despairing eloquence on the night when he had promised to watch over the safety of his lost love. How far off the time seemed! "Genius is of no name, of no nation." True, but the triumphs of genius were not for him. He was but a foolish boy, puffed up with vain hopes and vain longings, and his place in the world was among the taught not the teachers. He would go back and settle down to his drudgery, and forget that he had ever owned an aspiration higher than the counter. But he would be true to his promise, he would to the last watch over the wife of his enemy, and would save her from the toils of sin and shame that some strange instinct told him were fast closing in around her.

He wrote to Bland to remind him of his promise, and then set himself to do Dacre's work, with eyes watchful of aught that might throw light on the mystery he sought to discover.

Mr. Rupert Dacre himself was ill at ease. He was playing a very risky game, and a false move might be fatal. Up to this point all had gone well enough. Hus-

kinson had told him that he was sure of the issue of the contest as far as the Government were concerned.

"They are bound to return one of you," said he. "Crofts has no chance at all."

"Are you sure?" asked Dacre.

"Quite. I never jump at conclusions."

This was on the evening of the first day, and the votes were as yet all in favour of the New Town candidate.

"Those people exhaust themselves at first," said the experienced Huskinson. "I never knew it otherwise. We shall out-vote them to-morrow."

As he spoke, the noise of shouting and cheering came up from the street below. Huskinson smiled.

"We don't waste our breath in shouting," he said.

Dacre tried to return the laugh, but the attempt was a failure. He was harassed and fatigued. This was his first election contest, remember, and the suspense and excitement was more than enough even for his cool head and practised assumption of indifference.

"I wish it was over," he said, and helped himself to wine.

Huskinson looked at him from under his bent brows. The agent was a man of ability. He knew well that, of the two candidates for the honour of representing Kirkminster in the Conservative interest, the more talented, the more useful, was the man before him. He knew also that Rupert Dacre's heart was set upon victory. He was quite familiar enough with the world to know that the private secretary of his old patron could not but live up to his income, and perhaps beyond it. But Rupert had done his work well, and was admitted to have claims upon the Government; and he knew that if ever Lord Nantwich became premier, the young man would be fairly started on the road to fortune and power. Jonas Huskinson was an honest man, and did his duty to his employers without consideration for personal feelings, or personal friendship, but he had in his pocket at that moment a letter which Dacre had long expected, but the contents of which he would have given much to know.

True to his scheme, when he found that Cyril was likely to be returned, Rupert had brought into play his knowledge of his rival's former delinquency. "Nantwich

has only sent me down here to make sure of the borough," he thought. "I know the old fox too well to imagine that he will waste money in election expenses if he thought that Chatteris was certain of the place, or that his affection for me is so great as to lead him to oust an eligible man for my sake; but if it gets abroad that the Conservative candidate is the Radical writer in the *Mercury* who put out the Ministry, I think that Master Cyril may go back to Matcham as soon as he likes, despite his father's friendship with the Government." But it was not so easy to achieve this with security to himself. Had he been in direct opposition to Cyril, the thing could have been easily done, but he was presumed to be but a friendly antagonist, and he had no wish to quarrel with Saville Chatteris. If the mine was sprung at all, it must be sprung from a distance, and in secret. It was a very ticklish thing to attempt, and he had reserved it for his last resource; but his chance of election had seemed so poor that he had been compelled to fire his last shot, and if that failed, he would be defeated to a certainty. He had shot his bolt artfully enough. The Earl of Fozzleton was in the country. To him had Dacre written a carefully considered letter, sent upon the specious pretence of some political details of town gossip, and referring briefly enough to his present electioneering business.

"I am in the Conservative interest, of course," he wrote, "as your lordship knows, and hope to be successful. I think, indeed, that there is little doubt of that party which your lordship has so long and so successfully led, coming again into power. The Radicals are working very hard down here, but Mr. Huskinson thinks that they have little chance, more especially as there is another Conservative candidate in the field—a Mr. Cyril Chatteris, a son of Saville Chatteris,—who, I fancy, stands better with the electors than myself. I frankly confess that though he is a friend of mine—(by the way, I think I mentioned his name before to your lordship), I hope that I may have the good fortune to beat him. However, I must not forget your lordship's patience in the consideration of my own interests. The political waifs and strays of news are very few. I see that," etc., etc., etc.

Of the result of this little bombshell Dacre had heard nothing as yet; he had almost begun to imagine that Foozleton had forgotten the intelligence sent to him so long ago. Such, however, was not the case. The Stop-gap Cabinet that had received Nantwich into its bosom when the Premier had been so ignominiously cast down, was on its last legs. Some faint attempts had been made to collect together the shattered fragments of the old Foozleton Administration, but such a project was seen to be useless. As I have said, dissatisfaction reigned supreme, and a "New Ministry" was talked of as if it was a thing of any moment. But the Conservative party made no sign, and the awful prospect of the so-long-hinted-at Liberal Ministry seemed close at hand. Nantwich had resolved to push matters to a crisis. He was tired of holding a secondary position, and resolved to make a bold stroke for the Premiership. Dacre's advice had been excellent. The country was tired of the pottering policy of the recent Government, but was not prepared to accept an absolute Opposition. It was the precise moment for the Party of Mediation to strike the blow. There were many difficulties in the way. It was necessary to soothe the extremes on either side, and it was not until much secret whipping and spurring that Nantwich got his team together. Foozleton had been an important item in Dacre's calculation. He was out of office, and his hopes of the premiership were blighted for ever. In this strait he would readily fall in with the Nantwichian scheme, and would bring with him a *clientèle*, valuable, strong, and numerous. But he was a bird that required cautious approaching; Nantwich was only waiting for Foozleton's adherence to give the signal for the fight, but Foozleton as yet kept carefully aloof. On the receipt of Dacre's letter, however, he had sought an interview with Nantwich. "I see your private secretary has resigned and gone up for Kirkminster," said he. "I suppose you want the borough, eh, Nantwich?"

"Not at all—not at—not at all," says Nantwich. "Another man—Chatteris,—make sure, that's all, eh?"

"I think that you will make a mistake if you let them return Mr. Chatteris," said old Foozleton, with his gray eyebrows coming down.

"Eh, what? Why so?"

"I have every reason to believe that he is closely connected with the Radical interest, and that he has more than once given them very important information concerning the Government."

The recollection of the *Morning Mercury* flashed across Nantwich. The Most Noble Earl wanted a little revenge, did he? He should have it, if he would pay for it.

"Indeed—indeed—indeed! Eh, eh, eh! You surprise me. Sit down, my lord; sit down, and let us talk it over."

The result of that conversation, was the letter which now reposed in Huskinson's pocket-book.

The parliamentary agent looked across the table at Rupert Dacre.

"I have had a letter from Nantwich this morning," he said.

Dacre's heart leapt. "What did he say?" he asked, with an enforced calmness.

"You're a lucky fellow, Dacre," returned the other. "Read it!" and he flung across the note.

It was very short.

"DEAR H.,—If there is any doubt about Mr. Dacre's return, you can use the Government interest to secure it.

"Yours very truly,

"NANTWICH."

Dacre's eyes sparkled. He was successful at last. There was no doubt about it now. He was as sure of being returned as if he had seen his name heading the poll on the morrow. He got up with a sigh of relief. "Well, it's a weight off my mind," he said, "for I was not very sanguine."

"I congratulate you," says Huskinson, getting up, "and now I must go. We meet to-morrow," he added, with a smile, "and I can then congratulate you again."

As he went out, Binns entered with the evening mail. Dacre seized the packet eagerly. There was a letter from Nantwich, telling him of the promised support, and also adding that Foozleton had come over to his views (Dacre

noticed, with pardonable pride, that he had written "*our* views") and that now all was ripe and ready. Rupert, forgetful of the presence of his "secretary," got up and paced the room delightedly. All was done, all was won! He had gained the summit of his hopes. To-morrow he would be member for Kirkminster, and in a few days his patron would be Prime Minister of England! Fortune smiled upon him. His eyes turned again to the table. Binns, who was sorting the letters, had stopped suddenly and was gazing with flushed face upon a little pink note, directed in a wavering woman's hand he knew well. Dacre saw the note, but not the boy's face, and in his present paroxysm of joy forgot all his fears and suspicions. He took the letter from Binn's unresisting hand and tore it open, letting the envelope in his eagerness flutter to the floor. Victory again! Fortune seemed to shower favours on him. The wretched note, tear-stained and blurred with haste, was another proof of his invincible powers. He had won all the stakes he played for, and as he crushed the paper contemptuously in his hand, he laughed aloud.

Binns, watching him from the shadow, could have leapt forth and struck him to earth for that laugh. Would have done it possibly, but for one thing. At his feet, shining under the candlelight, lay the bright envelope, face downwards, and Binns saw, what Dacre in his haste had not seen, that there was writing on the fly-leaf. He stooped quickly and picked it up. Dacre had turned again, and his face had resumed its natural complacency. The table was covered with papers, and he had much to do. "Sit down, Mr. Binns," he said, "and we will get rid of some of this writing. I shall have to go up to town to-morrow night, in any case."

Binns thrust the paper into his breast, and sat with it there, writing from Dacre's dictation until far into the night. What he wrote he did not know, the words seemed to form themselves mechanically under his pen, his thoughts had nothing to do with his fingers. He was writing and thinking of two very different things. The letter in his breast burnt him like fire. His thoughts were all of it. What was it? What did it mean? Were his suspicions confirmed? Had Dacre been playing his friend false?

Did Cyril Chatteris suspect anything? Did he—could he *know* anything? Had Dacre spoken truth to him when he had given him that memorable interview which had resulted in his present appointment? Could it be that Dacre wished him out of the way, and that he had been entrapped into leaving his watch and ward? Was this letter the first, or one of many? Had Dacre written to her before? What did his laugh mean? Was the letter an innocent one? When could he get away to read it? How should he act if its contents were evil? Should he be too late? This went round and round in his brain with desperate persistency. He still wrote on, however, in a sort of dream. At length the last letter was written, signed, and sealed, and Dacre dismissed him, with a well-bred sigh of weariness. The instant he was in his own room, he tore the note from his breast. The writing was evidently a postscript hurriedly written as a last repetition of something that had been repeated often in the letter itself.

"You *will* not forget? *Nine o'clock*. I shall be waiting—alone.
"C. C."

The blow had fallen at last!

He was stupified for a moment, and then he sat down on the little bed, and forced himself to think. "How could he save her?"

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN THE BALANCE.

HUSKINSON was right. *He* did not waste *his* breath in shouting. His people knew well what they had to do, and they did it. Potter raised his eyebrows when the great man told him that Dacre must be returned, but Piper simply bowed, and grinned acquiescence.

"I could have wished you had told us a little sooner, sir," he said; but Potter frowned him down, and ordered brown sherry.

"Mr. Dacre shall come in," said he. "We were prepared for either course."

"Quite so," said Huskinson, and the matter was finished out of hand.

But poor old Saville Chatteris was quite ignorant of all this. He expected that his son would be returned without doubt, and was prepared to meet Mr. Rupert Dacre with friendly condolence. Cyril himself was not quite so sanguine. He knew, better than anyone perhaps, the real nature of the adversary who was so smilingly opposed to him; and, despite all his father's assurances of victory, felt that the opposition wasn't so "nominal" as he would have it. However, he put a brave face on the matter, and chatted hopefully enough as the rosetted horses bore him to the hustings. After all, what did it matter? The election was but a secondary thought with him.

As father and son drove rapidly through the crowded streets, the bystanders cheered and bowed. Saville accepted the incense with high-bred ease. Cyril smiled too, and graciously waved a benignant glove. Happy pair!

But on the heart of one of them lay a heavy remembrance—a remembrance of a dusky church, and a sudden outcoming into bright sunlight—a remembrance of a little villa and a brief week or so of happiness—and then of a silly girl, a vulgar mother-in-law, a hated wife—and a terrible time of agony, cowardice, fear, and love—that had ended in infamy and shame.

What was the future that lay before him? Here was respect, honour, triumph, affection, and esteem. The shouting crowd, the plunging horses; the noise and tumult; the hand-shakings; the congratulations; the flattery that met him on every side; these were fitting for the heir of Matcham. The dull lodging-house, the dreary companionship of an unloved woman, the toil, the poverty, and, above all, the ridicule, was past and gone. He would not think of it. No, all would be well, all would be bright and fair. Let him but once get free, and he would live honourably and virtuously, would forget the past, and, happy in Kate's love, would make the future yield him the peace that he had missed. Mr. Rupert Dacre was hopeful also, but his calm face showed nothing. Saville Chatteris bowed graciously. "They are sure to return *one* of you," he said. "Of course," said

Rupert, with a smile; "but we can guess who that one will be," and he glanced towards the door through which his friend had passed.

Saville looked after his son with admiring eyes. "Well, Dacre," he said, "we are so well known down here, you know—"

"My dear sir," returned the other, "it was only a precautionary measure. The Radicals *were* so strong."

"I quite understand," says Saville, loftily. "But I think that we have no need to fear. You will dine with me to-night?"

"I am afraid that I must go up to town. In fact, I have made preparations to leave by the six o'clock train. Defeated candidates, you know, are always in the way."

Saville bowed in a politely deprecatory manner, and went off to shake hands with the Dean.

Rupert went off to his own room smiling, and felt so elated, that, meeting his "private secretary" hurrying down the passage, he stopped him with some pleasant jest about his labours being now ended—and "'Pon my word, you look quite knocked up, Mr. Binns!" he added, as he noticed the boy's red eyes and haggard face; and then Huskinson came up, and the two went off together.

The White Hart was divided against itself. That is to say, that one party was devoted to Mr. Dacre, and the other to Mr. Chatteris. Both the candidates occupied the same committee-room, and Piper and Potter were in appearance the abject slaves of both, while Huskinson, flitting round about, seemed like a respectable guardian angel. But Mr. Rupert Dacre, living at the place, was the object of an attention which was denied to Cyril; and, on the other hand, the fact that Cyril was the son of the great Saville Chatteris of Matcham, invested him with an importance which Dacre could not achieve. Consequently, though landlord, landlady, waiters, chambermaids, were all eminently conservative, there were waiters specially devoted to the Chatteris interest, and waiters specially devoted to the Dacre interest. During the last two days, a room of gloomy magnificence had been set apart for the lord of Matcham to take his temporary ease, and in that room Saville and Cyril were

at present hidden from the gaze of the curious. As Binns passed the door, Cyril came out—there was a speech to be made, or something, and he was going away to make it.

"Can I speak to you, Mr. Chatteris?" asked Binns.

The young man started. Here was another witness against him. He had seen him in the lane, but had almost forgotten him.

"You!" he said—"What do you do here?"

"I came down about the election."

"Oh!" returns Cyril, at once dismissing his suspicions.

"About the election, eh? Well, what is it?"

Binns looked at the waiter in the Chatteris interest, who was prowling discreetly about the passage. "Can I speak with you alone?"

A sort of presentiment of evil came over the "heir of Matcham" as he noticed the set lines about his once despised rival's mouth, and saw how quickly the plebeian, poetical, silly grocer's lad had grown into a young man, earnest and determined, and self-possessed.

"What is it about?" he asked again, settling the hot-house flower in his coat, with an affectation of ease.

Binns leant forward, but the half-closed door was opened again, and Saville came out hastily. "Come, Cyril, my boy, come—we must not keep these fellows waiting."

Cyril stood a moment irresolute. What could the boy want with him?

Saville looked a little wonderingly from one to the other.

"Has this gentleman any pressing business?" he said.

"No—no!" says Cyril, nervously. "—I'll see you again directly."

And in a few seconds Binns heard the crowd cheer as the pair came into view.

"When will he be back?" he said to the waiter in the Chatteris interest, who had been standing with his head on one side, like a meditative stork.

"Can't say, sir—I'm sure, sir. Poll closes at four, sir. Any message, sir?"

"No," says Binns, "no message"—and he went out.

He walked down the streets, away from the crowd that had gathered at the Town Hall. He could not decide on his course of action. Through the long night he had tried

in vain to think out what he meant to do. Dacre had basely taken advantage of his friend's confidence, had profited by his opportunities to instil suspicion into the mind of his friend's wife, was this very evening to meet that wife in her husband's absence. Yet, perhaps, it was a harmless meeting. Dacre might have told him the truth, and he *might* be the chosen confidant of the marriage. But, then, the wording of that fatal note. "I shall be *alone*." *Alone*. Oh! there was little room for doubt. Dacre had lied to him, and had betrayed Cyril. And Cyril? Binns hated him. Hated him with increasing hatred. He knew now that the love he felt for Cyril's wife was no idle passion. It might have passed away; indeed, at first, it was but the calf-love of a boy, smitten by the first pretty face, but it was more than that now. He understood how it had come to pass that he loved. It was the very fact that Carry loved another that made him love her so deeply. It was because he so hated the husband that he so loved the wife. His enforced absence had led him to invest the figure of Mrs. Manton's daughter with all the graces his imagination could picture. Had he married her, he might have been disenchanted, as he had sometimes thought Cyril had been, but now—now his love, nourished, and fed, and fostered, had grown beyond his control. Carry might be false to her husband, false to all the world, but he should always love her. She was, for him, not a woman, but an ideal. It was for her sake that he worked, for her sake that he had read and written. "To make yourself worthy of her," Bland had said. And now that she had fallen, had found out her husband's baseness, or fickleness, or what not, and was about to bring shame upon herself—should he shrink from defending her? No. Though he hated Cyril with all the force that despised love and wounded vanity could lend him, he would not triumph in her dishonour. He would say to him—"The woman whom you cajoled from me by false promises and lying words, the woman for whom you struck me and insulted me—loves you no more, she is about to fly with another man, with a man whom you think your friend—but I—I, Binns the grocer's apprentice, the 'cad,' the despised and ridiculed—I have come to save her from

shame and you from dishonour!" That would be a noble revenge! And she—she should never know who had rescued her from the fate which awaits all wives who break their vows; she should never know that the boy whom she had ridiculed and laughed at had saved her from a life of shame and infamy, had arrested her on the very brink of the gulf, and had placed her safe within her husband's arms again. He would make the concealment of the part he proposed to play in the business the price of Cyril's silence—if, indeed, any price were needed—for Cyril would be only too glad to hide from his wife the knowledge that another besides himself had discovered her intended sin. He would go to Cyril, then, and tell him of the baseness of his friend and the weakness of his wife. He would send him back to London, and all should be explained and atoned for between them. Binns did not doubt but that Cyril loved his wife, and that their estrangement was the result of some quarrel or misunderstanding—he had read of such in books—and he knew well that Carry loved her husband, and would rejoice to have him at her side again. He judged only from appearances, and did not dream that the young man, to him so well-bred, so courtly, and so refined, could have sunk so deep in infamy as to have plotted his own wife's dishonour. No: he visited all the guilt upon Dacre's head,—Dacre the smooth, the self-complacent, the lying, treacherous villain. He grew quite romantic over the thought of his revenge, it was so poetical, so delicate, so noble. And he hugged himself at the notion that he, the laggard in the race, the "outsider," the nameless, obscure shop-boy, should hold all these strings in his hand, and be able to sway the destinies of the men who had sneered at him—as he willed. Who had sneered at him!—Yes. And as he walked, he began to think again.

At first—last night, in the dull silence of his shabby chamber, he had thought of a different course. He had half-proposed to himself to let matters go as fate would seem to sway them, and to leave Carry to her destiny; but the remembrance of his love, and of his promise, of her sweet eyes and soft voice, of all those happy days so far away, before she was a "lady" and he aught but a

poor, ugly boy who loved her;—the remembrance of Bland, the honest-hearted, rugged expounder of the gospel of truth and honour;—the remembrance of all that “might have been,” had not the handsome face of the scapegrace son of Saville Chatteris appeared in the little Dym Street lodging-house, came upon him in the midst of his plans of vengeance, and made his dull plebeian eyes fill with tears, and his red, coarse, plebeian hands clench themselves involuntarily. As he had sat last night upon his truckle-bed in the poorly-furnished inn bedroom—barren, like all inn rooms, of aught that spoke of home or comfort—a vision had come up before him. A vision of himself, respected, honoured, admired perhaps, mixing daily in the society of men of talent and genius, recognised by them as one of that band of workers whom they were proud to lead;—a vision of himself an author, a poet, a politician, a man of the people, a leader of the people, a name among men;—a vision of himself coming, going, moving among this brilliant crowd, cherishing the while in his own heart the knowledge that, close at hand, in some home made radiant by love’s light, and adorned with all the nameless graces which the presence of a pure woman lends to the meanest cottage, there awaited him a loving heart, whose sweet counsels would cheer and guide him; a gentle breast, where his head alone might lay down its weight of care; a tender voice, whose pure accents would bid him hope on and despair not; and a soft hand, that in his dark hour of trial or weariness would be lifted one moment from his aching brow to point in simple confidence to Heaven.

This was the vision of what might have been, the vision of what could never be. Such pure happiness was not for him; he was not worthy of it. And then in its stead came another vision. Himself again,—poor, vulgar, debased; sinking day by day, and hour by hour, back into that slough of coarseness and ignorance from which he had striven to raise himself; losing, in the grinding misery of his daily cares, all aspirations, all hopes, all memories; becoming, like he had seen others, pure animals, eating and drinking, for to-morrow they die; and, far away, that fair figure he had seen before, happy in a

luxurious home, rich in husband's and children's love, admired, and courted, and caressed. The thought made him clench those despised hands again. Why should she not be so? She was worthy of it. *He* could never hope to give her such a home. And yet why leave this happiness to another when he might destroy it with a blow? He could do it. He had but to be silent, and his enemy would be grovelling at his feet—dishonoured and disgraced, unloved and despised—as *he* had been. Why should he deny himself this revenge? It was fitting that Cyril should suffer. Perhaps even now he was triumphing.

There came a shouting and a beating of drums and crying. Binns shrank back into a lane to allow the troop of election rioters to pass. He had got into some tortuous lanes round about the Cathedral in his wandering, and a party of men wearing the blue riband badge of the Conservative interest pinned upon their coats, and flying from their hats, came up one of the lanes debouching upon the Cathedral square. They were on their way to the poll evidently. A man whom Binns knew as one of Piper's most trusted agents was in the midst. A drum was beating and a fife was playing, while around the main body, leapt and ran, and reeled and staggered, a ragged, drunken crew swept up from the public-houses and taverns, and hanging like a tattered fringe upon this gay garment of electoral privilege. They were going up to vote for *him*, Binns thought. What could not money buy? His enemy would be victorious again; he would be the honoured and respected member for Kirkminster, and a ruler and judge over all those who, like poor grocers' apprentices, were born to be oppressed, and ridiculed, and maltreated. All his desire for vengeance came back again. He would soon pull down the pride of this haughty aristocrat, who refused to listen to him, and took the good things of life so easily. He thrust his hand into his breast and felt the letter there. Here was the barbed arrow that would bring down the soaring falcon! He would *not* tell him. Let his dishonour overtake him, and let him be buried beneath it. He turned to go. But she——? What would become of her?

He stopped, irresolute; and then—following in the train

of the past procession, whose shoutings and trumpetings grew fainter in the distance—from under the lee of some old wooden-gabled houses, that masked the entrance to a poisonous, ill-paved court, staggered a hideous figure—a thing born of Night—a thing that lurks in dark corners, and hides itself from God's sunlight in foetid cellars—a thing familiar with blows, and ready with curses—a terrible, ragged, drunken, despairing, obscene creature, in whom God's part had long since been battered out, but who, nevertheless, reeled and staggered, and blinked with bleared eyes at the unwonted sunlight, and clutched tight some tattered fragment of a shawl with shaking hand, and crooned some butt-end of an indecent ballad with swollen, bruise-blackened lips; and was dirty, and half-naked, and drunk, and a Woman.

Tihere was his answer! To this fate would his evil passon for revenge bring the pure, fair girl he loved. Oh! better to kill her than that. Away with his mean and despicable envy of another's happiness! She loved Cyril;—well, he would give her back to him. He turned quickly, and walked towards the inn. The shoutings were redoubled, and he could see the crowd heaving round the Town Hall. It was late. The poll must be over; perhaps they were declaring it now. He would get speech with the new member, and would tell him that he must go up to London at once; must get there before Rupert Dacre could get there, and save his wife from the fate which awaited her. What a fate! He looked back, and saw the wretched figure going on across the flags of the Cathedral-close. The shadow of the huge towers seemed to swallow her up.

"God help her!" cried Binns.

Ay, God help her! Staggering, with some dim recollection of old days, perhaps, towards the porch, her slipshod, down-trodden shoe had caught in some unevenness of the pavement, and she had fallen and struck her forehead heavily against the cruel iron of the fast-locked Cathedral gate.

CHAPTER XLVII.

RETRIBUTION.

THE open space in front of the Town Hall was thronged with people. Pushing, expostulating, threatening, Binns made his way through. Something important had taken place evidently. Opposite the door the Chatteris carriage was standing, and the police were vainly endeavouring to keep a clear passage round it. The mob were shouting and yelling, and shrieking different names. Boys had climbed up lamp-posts, and were waving their caps to others below. All eyes were fixed upon the front of the building, and the crowd gradually surged and pressed up to the steps. Then the doors opened, and Saville Chatteris, followed by the man whom Binns sought, walked down the steps amid mingled groans and cheers and hisses and shouts; and the carriage door was opened, and, amid more shouting and cheering and hat waving, the horses plunged and started, and the carriage began to move. How was this? Should he lose him after all? He made an effort to get free from the pressure; but there was a sudden silence, and then somebody came out on the balcony and read something, and there was more cheering and hissing and hooting, and then Mr. Rupert Dacre, calm, courteous, and well-bred as ever, appeared behind the somebody with the paper, and bowed easily to the yelling mob below. What did this mean?

"Who is elected?" he asked of a man in an oilskin cap who stood next him.

"Dacre, dam him!" said the man. "I'd a rather had t' young squire than him; but them coves all came up and voted in a body. Bribe, I'll swear! Yah!"

And he relieved his feelings by a yell.

Dacre had got in, then, after all, and against such overwhelming odds! And Cyril was beaten; would now be driving back to Matcham, and he could not get speech with him.

The clock over the Town Hall pointed to five. Nine o'clock, she said. Then Dacre must go up by the six o'clock train. He only had an hour.

Backwards, desperate, he plunged. He was against the tide now. Men cursed him and threatened him. He was borne on by sudden shiftings of the crowd, and had to struggle all the way back again. He was down once, and nearly trampled on, but some burly fellow caught him by the hand, and dragged him to air again with an oath.

There was a little island, as it were, of open space at one spot, where a woman had fainted, and where, by dint of shouldering, a little air had been got for her, and this gave him a great start. He kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the sign of the "White Hart," that swung above the crowd in the High Street. It was at the "White Hart" that he could find Cyril, if he had not gone straight home.

More pushing, more cursing, more shouting and hooting—started by those around the Town Hall, and taken up by the others without knowing why—more expostulations, and shrieks, and groans, and a consciousness through it all that Mr. Rupert Dacre, with a flower in his button-hole, was bowing, and laying his kid glove on his coat, and neatly turning his paragraphs, and pointing his witticisms, and that the six o'clock train would go in three-quarters of an hour.

A desperate struggle at last; the White Hart nearer and nearer: then a wild shout, and sudden movement of the mass, and a confused gabble. Mr. Rupert Dacre had taken his paragraphs, and his witticisms, and his flower, and his kid gloves, into the Town Hall again, and the six o'clock train went in half-an-hour.

Another man on the balcony—Mr. Ebenezer Crofts, in a black coat and a yellow rosette, greeted with terrific cheering and waving of dirty caps. Then a savage roar for silence, and then a murmurous interval as before, broken by the same yells, and hoots, and cheers, and hisses. Out of the crowd at last—torn, dusty, hot, and hatless—sorely bruised and shaken, but out of it. On the steps of the White Hart, with the Chatteris carriage still standing there, and the six o'clock train going in twenty minutes.

Waiters in the Chatteris interest were in the hall; waiters in the Chatteris interest were in the passage;

waiters in the Chatteris interest were upon the stairs.

"Who'd a thought it?" "Mr. Dacre, too!" "Dear me!" and so on, through which murmuring Binns pushed his way.

"Now, then, young man, where a' you a' shoving to?" asks an indignant waiter in the Chatteris interest who guarded the Chatteris door. "I beg yer pardon, Mr. Binns; I didn't recognise yer," he adds immediately, for Binns' "master" was now a man to be treated with respect. "Lor' why, where have yer bin to? Yer coat's torn to ribbons."

"I want to see Mr. Cyril Chatteris at once," cries Binns. "Where is he?"

"He's in there," says the waiter, pointing to the door where Binns had paused in the morning. "They're all there."

Without stopping to consider what might be included in the "all," Binns hastily thrust a crumpled card into the man's hand.

"Take him that, and tell him I must see him at once!"

The waiter stared, and then opened the door.

Cyril Chatteris was there, and so was his father, and Kate, and Lady Loughborough. It would seem that Kate, growing anxious, but nothing doubting of ultimate triumph, had half teased, half begged the Ruin to come with her into Kirkminster, and await with congratulations the successful candidate.

When the state carriage drove up, James, the state coachman, discovered the face of John, the pad-groom, among the idlers on the steps, and learnt that "Miss Kate and the old 'un had brought the broom up." Saville, furious and indignant, and Cyril, savage and silent, had found the two prepared with congratulations.

"Well, my dear Saville," says Lady Loughborough, "we have come up to congratulate Cyril, you see!"

"Cyril, dear Cyril!" cried Kate, with sparkling eyes, "I could not stop at home, but——"

And then she paused.

Cyril flung himself into a chair.

"You might just as well have stopped," he said. "I'm beaten."

"Beaten! Who has got in then?"

"Dacre," says Saville shortly.

"Well, he is an admirable young man!" said the dowager spitefully, mindful of her rebuke anent the question of Harry Fairfax a few days before.

"There has been foul play somewhere," says Cyril, nervously rising. "Why the odds were all in my favour!"

"I suppose we did not take all the precautions we might have done," says Saville, dignified even in defeat. "I suppose that Dacre acted fairly enough. He was compelled to stand."

"It's Huskinson's fault!" says Cyril. "He must have known."

"Mr. Huskinson knew the wish of the Government, I suppose," returned Saville, who looked upon the parliamentary agent much in the same light as he did upon his butler. "After all, Dacre was Nantwich's secretary, you know; but if he meant to give him the borough, he might have said so."

"Mr. Dacre could not have been so treacherous, surely," says innocent Kate.

Cyril laughed a harsh, grating laugh.

"Oh, yes, he could!"

"I do not think that he *did* expect it," said the father. "He would have told me, I think, if he had. You must be mistaken about him, Cyril."

Cyril laughed again.

"Oh, I don't care," he said, with a look through the fast darkening window into the street below. "I always told you that I should be beaten. I don't want to have anything to do with them. I'm glad I didn't wait to speak; it will show them that I don't care."

"I do not think it will," said Saville, gravely. "But that is not of much moment now."

Kate had stolen over through the fast gathering gloom, and had put her hand on Cyril's arm caressingly. He took it and kissed the little glove. What did he care about Kirkminster as long as Kate loved him!

"Never mind, my darling!" she whispered. "You cannot help being beaten, and you fought honourably, you know."

"Of course," says Cyril.

"You would not—could not do otherwise, I know," said she.

The door opened. "What is it?" says Saville. "A card—Mr. who? What does he want?"

"Mr. Binns, sir," says the waiter, "wants to see Mr. Cyril, sir."

Cyril's heart gave a sudden leap, and he felt a presentiment of coming evil. What did the boy want again with him, and at such a time? He would not see him. "It's nothing of any consequence," he said, in answer to his father's inquiring tone. "Tell him I can't——"

But Binns, with a terrible consciousness that the six o'clock train was going in a quarter of an hour, had caught the first word, and was in the room.

"It is of consequence—great consequence. Mr. Chatteris, will you let me speak?"

Cyril, seeing in his face now on what subject he wished to speak, and knowing that Kate was there at his side, within reach of his hand, would have stopped him, would have taken him into another room, would have bought his silence somehow, but the attack had been too sudden and it had overpowered him. Moreover, all in the room were eager to hear, and there was not time to invent an excuse. His whitening lips had begun to frame some faltering sentence about private business, when Saville, all unconscious, broke in,

"Go on, sir! What have you to say?"

Binns turned from one to the other. This was the father then. Lady Loughborough he did not know; but there was the girl he had met in the lane—his cousin. As he looked, he saw her steal out her hand in tender alarm, and clasp it on the one which rested upon Cyril's arm. He guessed it all then. The memory of his own love gave him power to read the story written in that gesture. This was the woman for whom Carry had been deserted. He would not spare now. He turned upon Cyril with a fierce suddenness that made Kate draw closer.

"Go back to your wife," he said, "if you wish to keep her your wife!"

Kate gave a cry, and then clung to her lover. Cyril

did not move—he had expected this. As soon as he saw the look the other flung at him, he knew that the revelation must come, so he determined to face it with a sort of desperate courage, as he had faced the same revelation before.

"You are mad!" he said. "*My wife!*"

"Yes, your wife, Caroline Manton, whom you married in Dym Street before your brother died, and who lives with you at St. John's Wood as Mrs. Carter."

Saville Chatteris had bent forward in horror at the word wife, but his brow cleared a little at the explanation, "Lives with him at St. John's Wood." He thought he understood the nature of the connection.

"What is this nonsense, Cyril?" he said.

Kate had got back away from him a little now, and was standing listening with white face and parted lips.

He waved a deprecating hand. "Nothing," he said.

"An indiscretion—a temporary—you understand."

"You lie!" cries Binns. "You are married to her! You know it!"

The old deadly glitter came into Cyril's eyes. He was driven to bay, was he? Well, they had best not provoke him too far.

"Take care what you say, sir," he said, "or I shall have you put down stairs. I have had reason to chastise you for your impertinence once before. I shall do it again, perhaps."

"Really, Cyril, what is all this?" said Lady Loughborough, rising in great trepidation. "Who is this person?"

Binns, ragged, torn, dusty, and furious, turned round and faced his new adversary.

"I have come here to save a poor girl from dishonour!" he cried. "I have come to save that man's wife from infamy! Ha, does that make you wince!" as Cyril strode forward. "Your wife is going to elope with Rupert Dacre to-night at nine o'clock, unless you go home and save her."

"Cyril, this is not true? This woman he speaks of is not your wife?" The words were Kate's.

"My wife! No, dearest, not my wife!" Saville Chatteris had risen. "I will explain it all to you, sir, to-morrow." (He must gain time; to-morrow, perhaps, his wife would

be far away, and at that thought a strange jealousy struck him.)

The tone and words made Binns shudder. Though Cyril had neglected his wife, had denied her even, he had never doubted but that he loved her. Now, like a flash of lightning, this hideous indifference had lighted up the whole black gulf of Cyril's heart, and he saw that he had plotted his wife's dishonour.

"Are you a beast," he cried, "with no touch of sympathy or pity? Can you plot your own wife's shame, and leave her to her fate without remorse?"

Saville Chatteris, standing strangely erect by the table, said, in a high, clear voice,

"How do you know this, Mr.—Mr.—Binns?"

Kate looked across at her uncle with fear in her eyes.

Binns dashed his hand into his breast, and held out the fatal letter.

"There," he cried. "Do you know that writing? Do you know that writing?"

The sight of the letter made Cyril turn sick. He snatched it, and staggered to the window. Kate gave a cry.

Mr. Rupert Dacre,
White Hart,
Kirkminster,
Loamshire.

PRIVATE.

and in the fly-leaf,

"You *will* not forget? *Nine o'clock.* I shall be waiting—alone.
"C.C."

At the sight of this tangible proof that his infamy had been successful, that he had alienated his wife's love from him for ever, and that he was dishonoured and disgraced, the miserable boy experienced an awful revulsion of feeling. He stared at the letter in a stupid despair, and said nothing.

"Do you know it?" says Binns, again. "Do you know it?"

It seemed that the whole room waited for his answer.

He slowly raised his head, and, crumpling the paper in his hand, said,

"Where did you get this?"

"I found it," said Binns, "last night! Quick, you must go—at once—you will be too late. He goes at six—six, do you hear? six!"

"You will be too late, Cyril," repeated the old man, still erect and motionless. "You will be too late. Do you hear?"

Cyril dashed the paper to the floor as though he would annihilate it, and then his haggard eyes wandered from one to the other despairingly. His sin had found him out at last. Had found him out through the instrumentality of the very boy whom he had despised, and ridiculed, and insulted. He had lost the game. Even with all advantages in his favour, he was beaten at last. All was known now, and he would be scorned and detested. His own infamy and cowardice had brought him to this pass; his own treacherous plots had betrayed him. He saw at once that there was no hope. The story of this unknown, torn, dusty, impassioned boy, hastily told, unexplained as it was, bore about it the stamp of truth, and his own momentary pang of jealous weakness had confirmed that story in his father's eye. He knew his father's prejudices, and his father's pride. He knew his father's hatred and detestation of all that was dishonourable and base. To have disgraced his family by marrying beneath him was bad enough; but to deny that marriage, to engage himself to his cousin, and, in order to consummate that engagement, deliberately plot and assist at the seduction of his own wife, was infamous, unpardonable, horrible.

His father slowly raised his thin, white hand, and silently, and with averted face, pointed to the door. Cyril moved towards it, and then, in sudden abandonment of desperation, turned back.

"Kate!" he said in a broken voice, "Kate! Forgive me!"

Lady Loughborough—woman still through paint and powder—had caught the girl in her arms, and from that shelter Kate looked back at him. Her face was colourless, but tearless. Her eyes bright and dilated. At the sound

of his voice she turned her lustrous, scornful glance full upon him. All the tenderness had gone out of it now. The unhappy wretch, quivering with shame and rage and fear, read in those pure orbs no sign of love, no touch of pity.

"Go!" she said, with a sort of shudder. "Go!"

He moved towards her, and would have caught her hand, but for the light in those terrible eyes. "Kate! It was for your sake!"

She flushed crimson. "For my sake! You did this infamous thing for *my* sake! and you dare to tell me so! Oh—oh—oh," and she hid her face, sobbing for the shame of it.

Cyril sprang back in desperate rage of despair.

"So you all look black at me, do you? You all despise me and hate me! Curse you! and curse her! and him, and all! Ha, ha! *You* prate to me about honour and love and duty. Why, I have given them all, *all*, I tell you, for that girl there," he pointed to the sobbing Kate, "and she despises me! I have been a villain—a coward—a liar; I know it. It was for her sake I did it, and she hates me—spurns me. That is punishment enough, isn't it?" He stopped a moment to wipe his parched and bleeding lips with his handkerchief. "You think I haven't suffered. Suffered! Ask Rupert Dacre; he can tell you. Rupert Dacre, the man of the world, the clever, pleasant, agreeable, good-hearted Rupert Dacre." (It is impossible to convey on paper an idea of the wolfish sneer with which he said it.) "The man of taste and experience, the man that was selected by my dear father there to look after me, and take care of me, and advise me; the man who has beaten me at all points; the man who has defeated me here, and has gone away to take my wife from me. She *is* my wife!" He hurled the words in a paroxysm of revengeful fury at the silent Kate. "She *is* my wife, and he knew it, and proposed to me that 'he should take her off my hands;' that was his phrase. Do you hear me? I let him do it, and when she appealed to me for help against her own heart and his villany, I laughed at her. And I did this for your sake—for your sake—for your sake."

Binns, listening appalled at this outpouring of beastlike passion, wiped the sweat from his forehead. "O, my God!" he said, in that slow, distinct whisper, which is heavier with anguish than the shrillest scream.

"Will you go, sir!" said Saville Chatteris, in his clear high voice.

Cyril cowered before the bitter contempt expressed by the motion of the outstretched hand.

"Let me pass, you young fool!" he snarled at Binns. "You have done a good day's work! A nice bit of revenge for your beggarly friends to brag of! Do you know what I mean to do?" He stopped and hissed out the words, "I am going to London to find this Rupert Dacre, and when I find him I shall kill him!"

A hideous pause, during which his glittering eyes flashed hate and rage and despair at them all in one wide sweep, and then the door was burst open and he was gone.

There was silence for a moment, broken only by the sobs of Kate, and then the old man lowered his hand stiffly, and turned to Binns.

"I do not remember your name, sir," he said, "but I will tell you something. Do not be proud, sir. I was proud, and I had two sons. One died, sir, and the other has disgraced me."

"Saville!" cries his sister, alarmed. "What is it? Are you ill?"

The waiter in the Chatteris interest who had been lurking outside the door, and had been nearly knocked head over heels by Cyril's sudden exit, heard a heavy fall in the Chatteris special private apartment, and came in. The old man was lying on the floor senseless.

As they were taking him away, Binns, silent and terrified at the ruin which he had wrought, was following, when his eye fell on the crushed and flattened envelope that lay on the floor. The sight of it revived all his own misery. He stooped and picked it up. The action was so full of grief and pity, that Kate stopped.

"You knew her then?" she said.

"Knew her?" cries poor Binns, with an agony that made him almost sublime, "I LOVED her!"

The door was closed; they were too much occupied

with the sick man to notice *him*, and he sat there until it grew dark, with the paper before him, patting and smoothing it, and crying over it.

"You were not to blame, my dear," he said. "You were not to blame."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LONG ODDS.

TEN o'clock at night in the subscription rooms.

The smoke suffocating; the noise deafening. Book-makers, racing-men, noble lords, ruined spendthrifts, rich manufacturers,—all mixed up in a wonderful *olla-podrida*. Tobacco-smoke heavy in the air, laughter and chatter, with an under glow of vigorous betting visible.

"Five to one!—Fifty to five!—In ponies?—No, can't do it, my lord!—I'll lay against Fly-by-night!—Fifty to five against Lemon-peel!—How are you, Jack?—Ha, Fitz!—Vell—vell! no m' lord, 'pon my soulsh, can't do it at the prish!—Well, Windermere, when did you come back?—Ministry going out?—nonsense! I heard it on the best authority!—How is la belle Hélène?—Och, don't minton her, the little vhiper!—Twenty to one!—Give me a light, Tom, will you!—Seen the 'oss last night!—Sam Dowton came down—lay in a ditch out there by the castle; rheumatism in his back, and can't walk!—Ha, mon cher Vitz Vederique, je vais mes gobliments!—How do', Gablentz; broken 'nother bank?—I'll lay against Andromeda!—What's your figure?—Done with you?—Haven't the honour of your name, sir.—A modest pony. Smashed up!—Bolted from college with some woman.—Irish Church must go—As fast as you can clap your hands.—S'elp me, but I saw it with my own eyes!—Too much weight—never catch her!—A hundred to two!—Remember me to the old boy!—Nantwich will do it.—Poor old Snuff-box! Who's that man backing the Cardinal?—Calverly—rich Australian.—Ah, gweasy, gweasy!—Sixty to one, sir: yes, sir, in monkeys.—Anything in *my* way, my lord?—The neatest leg and foot I ever saw in my life—give you my honour—danced the Romalis

in the market-place—good cigar—stopping at the Bell—hot grog—broke his neck—Rome—Newmarket—carries two stone—lost my hat—*écarté* in the carriage—Fly-by-night—Lemon-peel—best run of the season—over the mahogany—chaff—ruined—broken—done—lose your money—damme, sir, you're on my toes," etc., etc.,—out of which Babel, Major Ponsonby dragged Bob almost by force.

"Don't plunge any more, my dear boy—don't," cried he, almost pathetically.

The old Duke of Raikesmere (Regency Raikesmere he was called in the clubs) who was standing on the steps, cursing the disgusting practice of tobacco-smoking, looked up with a wicked leer in the corner of his sodden old eye. "Another booby going to the deuce!" was his muttered reflection.

"I mean to win, Ponsonby!" cried Bob. "I'm sure that boy can ride him."

"Well, but don't put any more money on now, there's a good fellow. Leave it till to-morrow, at all events. We will do what we can. That fellow of mine is pretty smart, and I don't think that Mr. Docketer attempted any nonsense with the horse, though both he and Ryle have laid against him, I know."

"And Dacre?"

"Yes, but Master Rupert is such a cautious bird that you can't 'fix' him with anything. He got you to buy the horse, but that is all you can say, and he only did so to oblige you. If you could prove now that he took any money from Ryle—"

"He owes Ryle money, I know."

"So does everybody else, more or less. However, he didn't do the right thing about it, and all the fellows who heard the story say so."

"By-the-bye, his election comes off at Kirkminster to-morrow," says Bob.

"Yes," returned the other! "great row in the old shop. Poor Fred's brother is up too, I see. I don't think Dacre has much chance."

Bob didn't reply. The thought of Cyril made him sad.

"Come down and let us have a look at the horse," he said. "It isn't far to go, and I should like to see all safe."

The old "bullock" was lying down in his stall complacently.

"He's a fine old beggar to sleep," says the Hon. John.

The Cardinal turned a shining eye reproachfully. From what could be seen of him, as he lay in the fresh straw, with his muscular thighs tucked up under the clothing, he looked sleepy and stupid enough. Master James Seabright, with the natural desire to show off a horse that animates the breast of every jockey, was about to rouse him, but the Major stopped him.

"Let him alone," he said; "and send Ricketts to me."

* * * * *

After the conversation in which the Hon. John had learnt how his friend had been dealt with, he had taken the superintendence of matters into his own hands.

"You leave it all to me, old man," he had affectionately said. "If I can't win for you—which I don't think likely—I can, at all events, get you a fair show for your money."

Consequently, the wily Docketer received frequent visits from the Major at all sorts of odd times, chiefly in the early morning; and just before the Major returned to barracks, he let drop, in the course of a very pleasant and agreeable chat, a few recollections of his with reference to a horse-coping case in Pontefract, some five years before. Docketer started a little at this, swallowed a glass of the celebrated brown sherry the wrong way, and, when he was bidding his guest adieu, said,

"You've got a most uncommon memory, Major, you 'ave."

"Yes," said Jack, "I can remember a good deal when I think a little, but then I never do think. By the way, you can let me know how the horse gets on, Docketer; I'm interested in him."

"All right, sir," says the other, and wondered if the "boy" had said anything about the trial.

Jemmy Seabright looked so preposterously innocent when the question was asked him, that the astute Ryle, who was present at the inquiry, at once guessed that Ponsonby knew all about it.

"Have you got much money against him, Docketer?" asked he.

"Not werry much."

"Well, I don't know if he can do anything, especially with the weight; but I wouldn't play any tricks with him if I were you."

Even had Mr. Docketer any such desire—which, to do him justice, he had not—his plans would have been frustrated, for the Major had sent down his own groom, who had removed the horse and little Jemmy to Chester three weeks before the present date.

* * * * *

It was Ricketts, grey-headed, upright, and lantern-jawed, who now presented himself with a half military salute.

"All right I suppose?" asked his master.

"Right as the mail, sir," says Ricketts, standing in a position which had some curious blending of the horsey and the soldier-like about it. "No one troubled 'emselves to come anigh us."

"See what a reputation we've got," says the Major, cheerfully, "they won't even look at us. Well, Jemmy," to the lad, "you must do your best."

"Look here, sir!" says the boy, with a strange quiver about his lip, "you done for me what nobody ever did afore, and I'll win this race for yer, sir, if I never ride another!"

To which sudden burst, the good-humoured Jack said only, "All right, you little beggar,—cut away to bed, and don't get smoking."

"Gratitude in a racing-stable!" says Bob, who was becoming cynical, or trying to become so.

The rigid Ricketts, who was a bit of a philosopher, and subscribed to a mechanics' institute, only said, with a shake of the head eminently suggestive of a tight stock, "Human nature's a dam rum thing, sir—begging your pardon for the oath. It's like 'osses and Johnnie-raws, sir—bullyin' ain't no use;—you must Rarefy 'em, if you want to do any good with 'em." At which curious jumble of drilling and horse-taming, Bob laughed, to Ricketts's intense disgust.

As they stepped out into the stable-yard, a large drop of rain fell on the Major's glove. Both looked up. The

sky was dark and threatening. It would seem that the clouds had come up out of the valley of the Dee, and were spreading themselves over the city.

"Bravo!" said the Honourable John,— "that's glorious, if it only lasts!"

"What is?" said Bob, forgetful for a moment.

"Why, the rain, old boy!" cried the other, turning up his coat-collar. "It'll make the ground too heavy for the light lot, you see if it don't."

At the subscription rooms, the same gabble was going on. Fly-by-night, the property of Lord Windermere, was the favourite, at two to one; next came Lemon-peel, by Citron out of Pomme-de-sucre, one of the many horses with which poor Count Karateff still came valiantly to the front, at eight to one. The Automaton, Andromeda, Tambourine, and Penelope (pronounced Pennyloap by the Ring) at ten to one, or thereabouts, and a host at fifty to one, one hundred to six, and odds of any length, among whom was the despised Cardinal. Welterwate, Pierrepont, and Miniver stood to win upon Lemon-peel, while Berry, and his friend Fitz-Frederick had, as they graphically expressed it, "'gone a cracker,' on the favourite, and no mistake." Gablentz had made a book of course, so had Randon, who, having got well on as soon as the weights were declared, went about, vowing that "He owned—he fu-fuf-wankly owned he *was* a lucky fuf-fuf-fellow!" Little Figleaf, who prided himself upon his knowledge of the world, and would have given at least six points over the market price in order to bet with a duke, had placed his little pot upon Automaton, a big-boned chestnut of some pretensions, and the numerous "men," of whom Hethrington and Toodles are fair types, had all "got on" according to their lights, but not one had deigned to back the unlucky Cardinal. Yes, one. As the rooms were emptying, a little, pale-faced Jew, with a nose like a scimitar, and an eye like a snake, said, "Fly-by-night and Andromeda. Vell now, Muster Ryle, I garrn't. I vould if I gould, but I garrn't."

Just then the quick ears of Mr. Charles Ryle caught a distant rumbling sound, and heard a rapid tapping on the windows.

"I'll take the Cardinal instead of Andromeda then, if you like to give me five to two," said he.

The Jew booked the bet, and, as he did so, a terrific peal of thunder rattled overhead, and the storm broke in torrents of hissing rain.

"Do it again?" said Ryle, carelessly.

The Pole looked at him with bright, sharp eyes. "No, dank you," he said; and when Barnet Isaacs, considered the sharpest "leg" in all Jewry, offered eighty to one against the Cardinal, a few moments after, little Mikhailoffsky opened his blubber-lips and shot him in fifties.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE CHESTER CUP.

THE eventful day dawned at last. Heavy with clouds and fierce with raging wind. The good people of Chester, who had looked forward to the Cup day with immense delight for the last six months, grumbled as they drew aside their curtains and saw what a raw cold day it was. Many of them—honest burghers and what not—had not gone on the first day, preferring to wait for the great event of the year, and these were proportionately disgusted. The racing and betting fraternity established in various inns about the city, set to work doggedly hedging against the favourite, and by eleven o'clock, Automaton had nearly advanced to par. There was a gleam of bright sunshine about noon which deceived many, and carriages began to be seen here and there, and many a sober burgher yielded to his daughter's prayer, and took his chance of a ducking. The trains poured in their crowds of eager turfites. From London, Manchester, Birmingham, they thronged to the old grey city.

In Manchester and Liverpool the sun was shining brilliantly, and many hard, blunt, money-making faces grew harder and more coarse as they were protruded from the windows of the "1.50 down," or the "12.30 up." The wild hosts of the Ring, the Pariahs of London Arabia, poured into the town. Wonderfully waistcoated, ravishingly

ringed, with beribboned hats, with wild expanses of shirt-front, and stupendous exaggerations of fashionable attire, the billiard-markers, the Jew speculators, the 'fast' blackguards, the swell-mobsmen, the card-sharpers and skittle-players, spread themselves out over the course.

Sporting Jewry—puffy-lipped, fat-eyed, greasy, and infamous—betted, and shrieked, and cursed, and was alternately coarsely impudent and disgustingly subservient, now licking the mud off the boots of a lord, and now shaking a dirty fist in the face of some broken down "stag," as is the fashion of that particular class of Hebrew. From north, south, east and west, the land sent forth her spies. Few dainty women, fewer resplendent parties of giggling girls and pleasure-seekers. This was a matter of business, a matter of trial, a matter of serious earnest. The book-makers, clean-shaven and silent, bearded and garrulous, short and fat, tall and thin, in wide-awakes and bell-toppers, broad brims and narrow brims, with veils and without veils, all looked upon the coming race as a serious and awful circumstance. It would decide in a great measure the probable issue of the next Derby, and it behoved them to be careful and attentive.

All the sporting world was at Chester, but its wife was for the most part at home. The wives and daughters of Chesterian magnates in the grand-stand! the wives and daughters of Chesterian burghers on the Castle-hill! the wives and daughters of Chesterian lower orders scattered about promiscuously! but few absolute strangers. Sporting nobility in great force. Sporting nobility of all species, from the Marquis of Croxton, pale, upright, grey-whiskered, and gentlemanlike, down to the young Earl of Sydenham, beardless, blue-eyed, and baby-faced, who taps his retreating chin incessantly with the silver ferule of his riding-cane, and cannot spell, and was at Oxford, and is "on the Turf," spending his fortune as hard as he can in the company of legs, and *lorettes*, and fighting-men, and bullies, and swindlers, and birds of prey of all sorts. His mother, Lady Croydon, who is the leader of the Low Church Party, refuses to let him enter her doors—and his uncle, the Bishop of Blunderbury, says he is a "brand," and will not hear his name mentioned in his presence.

The stand is crowded with half the blue blood in England. Presently, the rain begins to sprinkle again, and coat-collars are turned up, and at last it comes down finely, but steadily; and Automaton goes up to par in less than ten minutes. Sporting nobility defies rain, and walks about calmly; and Royalty, in a white mackintosh, and smoking a cigar, walks about also.

The saddling-bell has rung, and the horses take preliminary leg-stretchers through the drizzle.

"There goes Fly-by-night!" cries Miniver.

"Too light for this weather—ground like a ploughed field," groans Fitz-Frederick.

"What about Automaton?" says Figleaf, emitting a volume of smoke,—as the raking chestnut, reaching madly at his bit, cantered down in the wake of the Favourite.

"Do you stand to win on him?" asked the other.

"About even, in any case," says the cautious *nouveau riche*.

"Where's Calverly's horse?" asked Welterwate, with his glass at his eyes. "He is a big brute—he ought to stick through the mud."

"Don't see him," says Miniver, looking round. "Oh yes—here he comes!"

Jemmy Seabright walked Lord Lundyfoot's destroyer slowly up the course, Bob and the Major standing watching, regardless of the fast falling rain.

As the horse broke into his swinging canter, and Ponsonby marked his easy stride, and watched the play of his powerful limbs, his heart rose, and he struck the young Australian on the shoulder.

"I wouldn't lay long odds against him now!" he said.

"Come on the stand!" says Bob, nervously; "they will start in a minute."

Some delay, some flag-waving, and shifting of colours; then a shout, and then a momentary hush, with the voices of confident bookmakers down in the ring heard distinctly.

They're off!

Tambourine leads, with Automaton and Andromeda close behind. The savage chestnut bores to the front; Andromeda changes her leg, and Sanderson (Karateff's

jockey) drives Lemon-peel level with her in an instant. Penelope, a vicious light-weighted filly, is leading the field; but the pace is too good, and in five strides the crimson colours of the Favourite slide out of the ruck, and a savage roar goes up from the Ring. Tambourine is shutting up at every stride; Automaton goes past him like a thunderbolt, with Lemon-peel hard on his quarter. The ruck lengthens out; and Bob's heart gives a great jump as he sees the paleblue jacket of Jemmy Seabright emerge out of the mass of colour.

The ground is beginning to tell. Careful Beresford eases the chestnut; but confident in the Barberini blood, Beamish forces Fly-by-night past Lemon-peel, and pushes for the lead. Tambourine falls away hopelessly; Penelope is going lame. The Cardinal sweeps past them both in three tremendous strides. Little Jemmy sets his teeth, and draws a long breath, as he sees Andromeda fade away on his left, and feels the black and orange back of Sanderson coming nearer and nearer.

"I say, Welter," says Berry, dropping his glass, "isn't that Bob's horse?"

"He's forcing the running awfully," says Welter. "He can never stay at that pace."

But the Beeswing blood was not given to shirking, and the son of Manxman and Grand-Duchesse never shortened his stride for an instant. Fly-by-night labours, and Automaton creeps up again.

"Curse the rain!" cries Windermere, between his set teeth.

Cynical Raikesmere, at his elbow, laughs grimly. "You breed 'em too light," he says,— "like every thing else nowadays!"

The Cardinal is neck and neck with Lemon-peel. Sanderson lifts his arm once, twice, thrice; but the ground is softer than ever, and the big brown horse leaves poor Karateff's colt a length behind.

Mr. Ryle in the top of the stand smiles contentedly, and Mikhailoffsky rises fifty per cent. in the estimation of the Croesus of Israel.

"He's gaining, Jack—he's gaining!" says Bob in a nervous whisper.

Round the level sweep they come, mud flying in sullen black showers.

"Automaton wins!—Automaton!—I'll lay agin Fly-by-night!—Automaton!—Automaton!"

Little Figleaf jumped up in his excitement.—He was going to win a 'pot' after all!

Jemmy Seabright drives in his spurs, and the brave old Beeswing blood reddens his boot-heels.

There is a roar from the Ring! Automaton twenty strides from the winning-post slackens his pace, and the crimson jacket is level once more; but, hard behind, a tower of strength, his mighty chest blackened by the mud from the heels of the Favourite, thunders the despised Cardinal.

The Major bit his lips till the blood started.

"What's that horse?—Blue jacket!—Blue jacket!—Automaton wins!—No!—No!—Fly-by-night! Fly-by-night—Fifty to one!—Sixty to one! The blue jacket has it!—The blue jacket!—The Cardinal!—The Cardinal!—H-a-a-a-ah!—S-s-s-s-sh—Fly-by-Night!—Automaton!—The Cardinal!—The Cardinal!"

Neck-and-neck. Whips cracking like pistol shots. The lean head of the Favourite, with nostrils wide and quivering, passes Beresford's elbow. An effort—another—shouting—yelling—grassland slipping away under the feet, like a dirty green riband—all the faces spinning round in one blurred white mass. The Favourite drops behind; and then Beresford flings back a cautious glance. A broad muzzle—a savage white-rimmed eye, and then a big brown neck, gliding past him, with Jemmy Seabright's little white face above it. His whip rises and falls; he feels Automaton's convulsive leaps; he hears dimly the savage shouts of the crowd; two more strides and all will be over!—the brown neck seems stationary—the winning-post flashes white on his left!

"Automaton wins. No—the Cardinal! The Cardinal! **THE CARDINAL!**"

"Snatched out of the fire, by G—d!" cries the Major, striking his gloved hand on the wooden rail in front of him; and Bob Calverly, dizzy, sick, and trembling with excitement, turned round to the crowd of enthusiastic

faces, heard the running fire of congratulations that met him on all sides, and awoke to the consciousness that he had won the biggest stake he had ever played for, and banished his momentary troubles at once and for ever.

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Yes—thanks to Jemmy Seabright's riding, the heavy ground and what not—the despised Cardinal, plastered with mud, reeking with sweat, bloody with spurring, won by a neck; Automaton second; the Favourite a good third; and poor Karateff's four-year-old nowhere.

CHAPTER L.

THE OTHER END OF THE CHAIN.

THE receipt of Binns's hurried letter had confirmed a suspicion which had long been shaping itself in the mind of Bland. That poor, good heart was sorely troubled. Amidst the smoke of his meerschaum he had dimly discerned a strange picture of impending evil; and he would ponder, in his lonely room by night, long and earnestly over all the doubts and fears with which the conduct of the brilliant contributor to the *Mercury* had inspired him. This concealment of marriage, this hiding away of a wife under a false name, was opposed to all Bland's old-fashioned notions of truth and honour. Yet there were reasons—strong reasons—reasons rendered familiar by plays, and novels, and stories innumerable—reasons plausible enough—reasons difficult to dispute—the old, stale arguments anent family pride and family embarrassment. But the concealment had lasted long enough, and the echo of society's rumour of Cyril's "engagement" had reached even the ears of unfashionable and Bohemian Bland. He was unwilling to credit it. In his love for Binns he tried to put away such thoughts, and did not care to imagine even for a moment that any disgrace could come to the girl whom his friend's heart delighted to honour.

He had gone—so artfully, poor fellow—to the Manhattan residence, and over many a "tea" had, through

the intervals of many a rubber, obtained full and fair accounts of the marriage and the quarrel. He had given himself over, bound, into the hands of the Jittlebury and the Perkin, and with his grey hair wildly rumpled, and his teeth on edge with nervous irritation, would gravely beat time to the mangled melodies of those Sirens, and never, by a syllable, betray the torture he was suffering. He would hand round muffins with an elegance that astonished himself, would find himself relating anecdotes of such literary lions as it had been his fortune to meet with,—found himself even, one memorable evening, actually singing "Barbara Allen," in a high-pitched voice, with a marvellous embellishment of quavers, and shakes, and trills, and sudden dashings at high notes, and consequent confusion and shame; would sit, with the tobacco-fiend gnawing at him for hours, and listen to long, rambling stories of the widow's vanished youth, and would sternly repress the savage desire to rush away, tear off his old, ill-fitting gala coat, and plunging into his ragged dressing-gown, smoke madly in all the unfettered freedom of bountiful Bohemia. He endured, with the patient tenderness that is the nobility of such mediocre hearts as his, all the clack and chatter, the ungrammatical gabble of sordid cares, and griefs, and joys; studiously ignored the widow's slips of tongue, and pardoned with a smile the vanities and follies of all the mock gentility among which he found himself. He was as courteous to the Jittlebury as if she had been a duchess; and though his toil-wearied feet had never trodden the soft carpets that fit the perfumed chambers of the great, his bow to the blushing Perkin would not have disgraced St. James's. For the sake of Binns—the enthusiastic boy who had chosen to call him "friend"—he bore his martyrdom without a murmur; happy if he could hear such news of the little girl who had so trustingly accepted his escort through the London streets, as would allay the fears of the poor boy who loved her.

It seems a small sacrifice, perhaps, to pass a few hours each evening away from books and thought and smoke. But these were all that made life endurable to the disappointed, wearied man, who had found the odds too

great against him, and had gone down in the fight. With books and thought and smoke he could defy his memories, could banish all regrets of past failures, and smile at all vain dreams of future fame. But with the new affection that had arisen in a life barren of all save pity since his young wife died—had arisen the new delight of self-sacrifice, the sweetest and purest joy in all Love's golden horn.

Bland, in the Mantonian domestic circle, presented a picture that was at once ludicrous and pitiful. His long, lean, angular figure, clad in well-brushed black of rigid respectability. His serviceable boots, pieced here and there, perhaps, but polished to reflective power. His double-breasted black cloth waistcoat, made after the fashion of a bygone age—when he was young, and spruce, and handsome, and hopeful. His serviceable thickness of silken watch-guard, which attached itself to the fat, old-fashioned shining, silver watch, that ticked with a pert and obtrusive noisiness, heard distinctly at a distance of two feet from his person. His tall collars, uncomfortably respectable as his coat. His thin hands, that always looked painfully clean and dry. His finger nails, clipped into filbert shape, and adorned with a carefully scraped rim of purest white. His scraps of grizzled whisker. His new-scraped chin and long upper lip. His hollow, cavernous eyes, that sparkled with a dry humour and honest kindness, for all that was weak and helpless, and glittered sometimes with an enthusiasm that defied the crow's-feet round them, and seemed in its genial heat to melt at once the gathered snows of his sixty winters. The little tricks and habits of the man. The knack he had of taking off his spectacles to laugh at a joke of the widow's, and putting them on again upside down. His merry confusion when told of his mistake; and the unconscious way in which he did the same thing again ten minutes afterwards. His feeling about for his pipe when interested in conversation, and awaking blankly to the knowledge that he was in "ladies' society;" his actually pulling out that implement of consolation bodily on one occasion, and cramming it back into the wrong pocket immediately, with profuse blushes. His harmless stories of harmless junketings and revellings which he related always

with the qualifying remark to the virgin Jittlebury, that "I was younger *then*, you know." His unassuming manner. His reverence for the great past masters in literature. His humble worship of the living great ones, who were still scoring their names upon the sand of popular fame. His rotundity of metaphor and Queen Anne stateliness of aphorism. His multifarious and marvellous knowledge of all that was quaint, and curious, and recondite, and useless. His outspoken detestation of all that was base and cowardly and cruel. His manly sympathy for all that was noble and honest, and his childish delight in all that was pure, and laughable, and innocent, and mirth-provoking. All these things, with a thousand other little touches of quaint goodness that cannot be painted in words, made up a picture that might have moved to laughter or compelled to tears. A picture which, as I strive to realise it, takes me back into that strange land, where the pathetic and the ridiculous go hand in hand—a land thrilling with tearful whispers, murmuring with tender laughter, and sighing with lost illusions; that land which we have all trodden in our childhood, which holds yet the mournful ghosts of our childish hopes, and fears, and faith; that happy, simple, twilight land, the memory of which, the turning of a sentence, the echo of a song, the perfume of a flower may bring back to us for a moment, but out of whose sweet shadow we have passed for ever.

Bland had succeeded in completely gaining the confidence of the widow. She—good, motherly, vulgar woman—had quickly discovered the true heart that was hidden by the shabby coat of the newspaper hack; and if her vulgarities grated occasionally upon the sensitive Bland, and each "h" that she dropped stuck into him like a pin and made him wince, he honoured her for her honest struggle with the world, and her love for her daughter. Out of the fulness of that love, and because she did not want to see her daughter made unhappy, the widow had respected Cyril's commands, and had never visited Carry. With the exception of that night, so long ago now, when the poor child, terrified at her husband's neglect, and haunted, perhaps, by some dim presentiment of coming evil, had sought the shelter of her mother's arms, she had

not even seen her. Rupert Dacre, having made good his footing in the St. John's Wood villa, and learning from Carry that her mother had tacitly consented to be separated from her, had not repeated his visit to Dym Street, and all communication between the two places had ceased. Mrs. Manton, confident in the knowledge that the marriage had been legally performed, and that Cyril could not repudiate it, was quite innocent of suspicion of wrong. But the continued concealment began to alarm her, as it had alarmed Bland.

"At fust it was to be jest temporary—to gain time to h'explain, you see, Mr. Bland, but now it looks as if he was waitin' for his father's death. Don't it?"

"It is not right. I cannot think it right," said Bland; but he could advise no course of action. "That friend of Mr. Chatteris, too, I do not understand that he should be so often at the house. Robert and myself have seen him leave—quite late."

"Yes—but lor, that's nothink! Besides, didn't young Binns go to the office"—the widow spoke of all places of business indifferently as the "office"—"and find out that it was all right? Oh, I know my Carry!"

So things had gone on from day to day. Upon the receipt of Binns's letter, however, Bland, as I have said, was sorely troubled. At last, after much smoke and cogitation, he resolved that he would inform the mother of Binns's suspicions and the rumours of an intended marriage between Cyril and his cousin, and would beg her to go and see her daughter herself.

The poor woman wanted but little urging. Hastily putting on her bonnet, and pinning her shawl with hands that trembled as much with anxiety as with anger, she took her way to her daughter's house.

"I'll soon get to the bottom of it!" she said. "I'll soon find out what he's been up to, the villain! My darling! Marry his cousin, indeed! I'll cousin him!" and so on.

Bland felt himself awfully guilty when he saw the widow's grief, and began to regret that he had told her. "Perhaps, it is not true after all. Robert only said that he suspected, you know, and rumour always exaggerates."

"Poof!—True!—Ho ho!" laughed the widow in ghastly glee. "I don't believe a word of it."

But she did, for all that, Bland knew.

All that day his conscience smote him for his cruelty, and yet he had a lurking conviction that the warning was necessary. He hurried to Dym Street as quickly as possible that evening, calling there on his way home. Mrs. Manton had not yet returned. At his lodgings he found a letter:

"DEAR MR. BLAND—Please come up at once. Things is much worse than we thought. Carry's ill, and I'm all alone here except the servant.

"Yours truly,

"ANASTASIA MANTON."

When he read this, he immediately imagined all sorts of horrors; blamed himself for not having wit enough to see the condition of things before, and so deeply was he agitated and moved to wrath against himself, that he struck himself several savage thumps upon the chest and took a fiendish pleasure in sitting exactly where the draught from the window of the omnibus that bore him to his destination would cut him most severely. When he reached the house it was eight o'clock. Mrs. Manton opened the door.

"It's you, Mr. Bland!" she said. "Thank God you've come! He'll be here in an hour."

"Who?" asked Bland, alarmed.

"That villain Dacre. You must see him. She's ill. They were killing her amongst them."

"What do you mean?"

"Come in, and I'll tell you!" said she. "Oh, I thought that you would never come!"

The widow had taken the villa by storm—rang violently at the bell—stopped the servant-maid's mouth with a "Oh, stuff and rubbish, don't talk to me!" and dashed into the little drawing-room like a wounded lioness. At the sound of her voice, there was a little scream, and then her daughter had flown down stairs, all crimson, and panting, and crying, and flung herself into her arms.

A silly sight, doubtless; no grand phrases, nor pretty sentiments; only a poor, distracted, miserable girl, clinging round her vulgar mother's neck, with sobs, and gasps, and kisses, and little pats and murmurs, and "Oh, mother! mother! It is you! My dear! My darling! Oh!—oh! Help me! Save me! Take me home! Oh, mother!"

By-and-bye the terrified woman got her upstairs, and soothed her a little, and drew the story out of her piecemeal. How her husband had neglected her and despised her. How Mr. Rupert Dacre came with his soft voice and protecting manner. How he flattered her vanity and made her think she loved him. "For I didn't, mother, I didn't!" she cried, in a sort of terror. How Cyril had gone, and how lonely she had been; and how Mr. Rupert Dacre had told her that it was for love of Kate Ffrench that her husband had left her alone so often. How she had gone to the theatre with him, and how Cyril had returned that night. That she had been nearly mad. That she used to drink laudanum in order to sleep. That she used to think of killing herself sometimes. That she would have told Cyril all, but that when she begged him to forbid the house to Dacre he had laughed, and told her that Dacre was his friend, and he wished her to know him; and, "oh, mother!" she said, "I thought then that he knew what had been passing in my mind, and that he wished to be rid of me. That he well knew what his friend would have me do, and that he gave him opportunities of seeing me in order that I might listen to him, and——"

"Why did you not come to me?" says Mrs. Manton, between her sobs of rage and grief.

"Oh, mother, I daren't; and beside—beside, I began to think that I did love my husband's friend, and that he loved me and would take care of me! Oh, mother, don't shrink from me! It was wrong, it was wicked, I know; but oh, mother, it was so lonely, and I did so want to be loved by some one!"

She stopped a moment to sob at the recollection of her loneliness.

"My poor dear!" said the mother, and patted her hand caressingly.

Carry went on in a low voice.

"He came again the next night. I was very miserable. I thought that Cyril didn't love me"—another sob—"and I had made up my mind to leave him. I told Mr. Dacre that I would go with him. He said that I must wait; that he had to go down to Kirkminster about his election. Cyril came in, and I saw that he knew, or had guessed at what had passed. He did not speak to me, and left me in the morning without a word. I then thought of coming home, mother, but I was afraid; and one day, when he had been gone a week or more, and I had heard nothing of him, I wrote to Mr. Dacre, and told him that I would wait for him to-night, and that if he came to fetch me I would go with him—"

"To-night!" cries the widow, alarmed.

"Yes, to-night. He is to be here at nine o'clock."

"Oh, Carry!"

"Mother, dear mother, I would not have gone; indeed I would not. I was mad, I think, when I promised to go; worse than mad when I wrote that letter. But I would not have gone. I had made up my mind what to do."

"What?" cries the poor woman, in a new terror.

"To—to—have died," says the girl with a shudder.

"To have died and forgotten it all. It's there?" she cried, starting up—"there on the table behind you! Oh, throw it away! Take it, mother, darling, and throw it away!"

The widow turned round, and instinct divined the meaning of the broken sentence. The little bottle was standing in the same place where Cyril had seen it on the night when he had returned from Matcham. The mother snatched it and hid it in her bosom.

"Not that, my child, my darling!" she said—"not that—not that!"

And then the two fell into each other's arms again.

CHAPTER LI.

HEART AGAINST HEAD.

MR. RUPERT DACRE, in a first-class carriage—with his rugs and shawls and other matters disposed comfortably around him; with an excellent cigar in his mouth; the soothing sensation produced by the presence of some very excellent soup and a couple of glasses of capital sherry under his waistcoat; with the congratulations of Huskinson yet ringing in his ears; with the pleasing knowledge of the fact that he was now M.P. for a very influential borough; that he was on his way to meet a pretty woman; that all his scheming and plotting had succeeded at last; and that his cynical, selfish policy had carried him over all obstacles—was very comfortable.

"The humbug that fellows talk about morality!" said he, and laughed pleasantly. "It is all very well to read about, but practice is quite a different thing. Here am I, an absolute proof of the virtue of viciousness. I have been persistently selfish from youth up; have never spared anybody, or anything; and have lived happily, cheerfully, and comfortably, up to the ripe age of thirty. At thirty, I am member of Parliament;—an influential person; known, respected, and admired; and have not been without my little *bonnes fortunes* either. This is one of them,—really, the most pleasant of any, I think. A nice girl—accomplished—loves me, too—and the wife of an intimate friend! What could the heart of man desire more? I have been very lucky. My destiny, I suppose. Kismet! We are the slaves of circumstance," he added, satirically, "and when one does an infamous action, it is consolatory to reflect that one is but an instrument in the hands of Fate!"

It would have been a strange comment upon his theory could he have known that at the moment the thought shaped itself in his brain, the seven o'clock express rattled and roared out of Kirkminster station, and that, flung into a corner of a carriage, with fierce eyes, staring as though he would pierce the darkness ahead, was Cyril

Chatteris, wild with rage, despair, and hate, borne through the blinding rain and furious sleet,—borne onwards through the silent night, with glare of red lamps, and rush and roar of wheels, and shrill shriek of fierce steam; borne onwards hard on his track with such relentless devouring of space and savage eagerness of pursuit, as might have belonged to the Avenger of Blood in the old Jewish days. But he knew nothing, suspected nothing. All seemed safe and secure, and he smoked and read, and laughed silently at his own cynical thoughts, and scoffed at all that was good and true, and hugged himself in his own hideous egotism, and was borne on to the end that the Fate he worshipped had in store for him.

Springing out at the station, he drove to Brook Street. His plans were all laid. The little cottage in a certain quiet suburb, tenanted recently by Mdlle. Aglae, late "tiger" at the *Bouffées*, Paris, was empty, and thither he would convey his prize.

"I shall have Cyril completely in hand then," he said. "Killing two birds with one stone one may say. He will marry the charming Kate, and I shall always have a comfortable home at Matcham Park,—and a sort of lien, so to speak, on the Matcham treasury. If, on the other hand, the marriage is broken off, I still keep my Cyril tied by the leg, and can either put in that Australian booby, or make her Mrs. Rupert Dacre." The thought of Bob made him speculate a little on the probable issue of the Chester Cup, which had been decided while his election had been trembling in the balance at Kirkminster. "I suppose Ryle's horse will be sure to be beaten. He was at a hundred to one yesterday. Even if he wins, I can't lose much;—but it's impossible!"

The careful Harris, who had been left behind to look after the house during Dacre's short absence, stared at the sudden reappearance of his master.

"Business in town," said Rupert, shortly. "Unpack these things."

Harris, who was quite well bred, had an appointment with a milliner's apprentice (she thought he was a man of family), and swore inaudibly.

Dacre glanced at the clock on the mantelshelf—(Una

and the Lion in bronze: Rupert cultivated the fine arts). It was half-past eight o'clock.

"Any news?" he asked, hurriedly swallowing a cup of coffee.

"Mr. Calverly's horse has won the Chester Cup!" says Harris. "Noos came by telegraph, sir."

"The deuce he has!" cried Rupert, and paused for a moment.

This unexpected reverse seemed like the beginning of disaster. Was his luck going to desert him, after all? But putting away the unwelcome thought, he comforted himself with the reflection that he had arranged in a measure for such a contingency, and that the event which made him a loser enriched his milch-cow, Bob Calverly. Moreover, the race was not of much moment with him now. He had won the big stake he had played for. He was member for Kirkminster, at all events, and his spirits rose again.

"Anything else?" he asked, with his back to the freshly-lighted fire, whose cheerful blaze gleamed upon the thousand luxuries which made up the elegant selfishness of his bachelor-rooms.

"Well, they do say, sir, that the Ministry's going out!" says Harris, whose evening paper had informed him of the result of the political combat at Kirkminster.

Dacre's eyes flashed triumph. He had heard some such rumour, too. He would go down to the clubs and hear more about it. If the Ministry resigned, his fortune was made. Nantwich would be Premier, and he—Rupert Dacre—provided for at once. But he must first take away the "little woman" whom he had come to meet.

"I may be back to-night, and I may not," he said, putting on his hat and gloves again. "You can leave the door latched and go to bed if you like," and then, humming gaily some opera air, he dived into his cab and drove off.

Harris, watching him from the door, rubbed his careful hands with a cat-like delight. "So we are a Member of Parliament, are we!" he said, going up to pick out a perfectly irreproachable shirt from Dacre's stock; and, as smoking one of Dacre's best cigars, he walked down to

make some excuse to the little milliner, he felt quite Representative himself.

Ordering the cab to wait at the corner of the street, Dacre gaily opened the wicket gate of the well-known villa. Lights were burning in the hall and in the drawing-room.

All was ready; she was evidently waiting for him. So certain was he, that he did not even pause to notice the trim little parlour maid who answered his ring, and who seemed eager to speak; but, pushing past her, he entered the little drawing-room.

No Carry, blushing, palpitating, eager, loving; no unhappy wife distracted with misery, and maddened with shame; no fresh proof of the truth of his cynical doctrine—but a thin, tall figure that he knew well; a haggard face and pair of scornful eyes, before which even his own bold glance quailed and fell.

"Mr. Bland!" he cried, in utter astonishment.

"Sit down, sir," says Bland, "I have been expecting you."

The blow was tremendous. Discovered!—and by such a *miserable* as the shabbiest reporter on his friend's newspaper! It was not often that the admirable Dacre blushed, but he did on this occasion. He could not reply for the moment, and the other stood looking at him as he might have looked at a dog. A moment's pause, however, sufficed him to collect his thoughts. He had been used to self-control all his life. It was the one virtue which he had cultivated, and it stood him in good stead now. How much did this fellow know? Was he a protector or a friend? How had he found out poor Carry's secret? Perhaps he only suspected it, after all.

"Pray, my dear Mr. Bland," he said, slowly pulling off his delicate gloves finger by finger, "may I ask you for the reason of your presence here?"

Bland, with one hand on the table and the other in his breast, seemed to be nerving himself for the contest. "I have come to tell you that your errand here is known," he said.

"Indeed! You will forgive me, Mr. Bland, if I am inquisitive, but will you kindly tell me what you believe

to be the nature of my 'errand,' as you are pleased to call it."

"To ruin a poor girl, who never injured you—you scoundrel!" says Bland, suddenly, turning his face full on him,

Dacre gave a little laugh, and stroked his beard. "My dear sir, what a mind you must have. Do you think, then, that I am a roaring lion, going about seeking for victims? Come, Mr. Bland, you are too hard upon me."

The shadow of disgust that crossed the other's face, brought the colour back again to Rupert's cheeks. "Mr. Dacre," says Bland, speaking over his head as it were, "there is no need to argue. I know all the story of your infamy and treachery towards your friend and your friend's wife. I know that you have come here to-night, at her request, to take her away from the shelter of her husband's roof."

"And pray how do you know this?" asked Dacre, smoothing his glove on his knee.

"I know it, that is sufficient."

"Not quite. You appear in a lady's drawing-room, at"—he took out his watch affectedly—"at half-past nine at night, and tell me some ridiculous story about 'husbands' roofs.' Does Mr. Cyril Chatteris know that *you* are under the shelter of his roof?"

"He does not."

"So I should imagine. 'Roofs' like this," the well-dressed man glanced round the well-furnished room, "are not usually honoured by such brilliant literary lights as you appear to be, my friend."

Bland, looking away over his head, said nothing. His silence was so full of scorn, that Dacre felt compelled to speak.

"Pray, who gave you the right to interfere in my affairs?" said he, rising.

"The right!" returned the other. "The right! Who gave *you* the right to ruin a woman to serve your own pleasures, you miserable coward?"

Rupert blanched to the lips at the insult, but stood still. He knew that any quarrel, any violence, would be useless.

"You appear to be a little silly, my friend. I have not

ruined any woman at present; and if I intend to do so, allow me to remark, that I shall do so without your interference."

"You are a mean scoundrel!" says Bland, with blazing eyes. "You think that profligacy makes you admired and liked; you set your passions by rule, and strike a weekly balance of your iniquities. I know you, and men like you; miserable imitations of vice; sordid shams of lust and passion. Your whole lives are a lie, your love is a lie, and your honour is a lie."

"Don't, my good sir, don't," says the other. "You are wasting excellent sentiment upon a very unworthy object. Casting your pearls before swine, I assure you. Keep that rubbish for the penny journals. And tell me, without any rhetorical flourishes, how it is that I find you here, instead of the very charming young lady I came to meet?"

He saw that it was all over now. He guessed that by some chance Carry's flight had been interrupted, and that his chance was gone. He would revenge himself upon Cyril.

"I was warned of your intentions," says the shabby reporter, "by your secretary."

"My what?"

"Mr. Binns."

Dacre began to feel ridiculous again. Rupert Dacre, the astute, the intelligent, the clever, the self-possessed, to be beaten by such an adversary.

"The little whelp!" he thought. "So he has been spying upon me." The ridicule of his position and the shame of his defeat came upon him, and with a sudden fury he leapt to his feet.

"Stand aside," he said, "and let me pass! She sent for me, and I *will* see her!"

With a terrible light in his eyes, the old man seized the other by the wrist with one hand, and forced him nearly to his knees.

"You villanous hound!" he said. How dare you say you 'will' see her? Her mother is with her; her mother knows all. The world shall know all to-morrow. She hates you, detests you, despises you. Do you think there is no goodness in the world, no virtue in woman, no

honesty in man? Take your hands from my collar! I have struggled with stronger men than you."

Rupert Dacre, white, breathless, trembling, was cowering on one knee at the feet of the poor old despised Bland, who seemed in that moment, by his streaming grey hairs, his flashing, scornful eyes, and his grim, gaunt figure, to be some terrible personification of outraged honesty and truth.

"Curse you—let me go!" cries baffled Dacre, in a choked voice.

In the height of his passion and anger, Bland shook him like a reed.

"You *will* see her! You *will* see her! You miserable scoundrel, have you no sister whom you love—no mother whom you remember? Have you any place in your heart that is not wholly blackened and corrupt, that you can dare to think of thrusting your damnable presence between a mother and her child? I know the whole history of this poor girl. I know how you offered up yourself a willing instrument to her coward husband's baseness. I know it, you dog, I know it. *You* dare! *You*! If I tell this story to-morrow, Rupert Dacre, you will be shunned by all the fools who now admire you. They may be cruel—they may be steeped to the lips in sin and folly, but not one of them would take your hand again if they knew what I do!"

He flung him off as he spoke, as if his touch were contamination.

Dacre sprang to his feet, and stood, shaking with mingled passion and fear, before him. He was beaten; he knew it. The girl had confessed all, and was now snivelling in her mother's arms. He had been duped by Binns, a "cad," a fool, whom he thought to have "used" as he pleased, and had been struck and insulted by a shabby newspaper hack. How London would laugh if the story got abroad! He thought of the devilish mirth of the smoking-rooms, and shuddered. One expiring effort he made, as he smoothed his crushed shirt-cuffs with a hand that would tremble in spite of all his self-command.

"You are very complimentary—very. But you don't understand these things. I don't want to disturb the mother's

blessing, my good sir. It is as imple matter of business to me. I am not likely to go into mourning over my loss. The girl wanted to come, and I was ready to take her. If she doesn't want to come, well—" And he shrugged his shoulders with an affectation of the old French manner.

Bland, breathing hard, stood looking at him as one might look at a strange animal.

"You say that you will tell my friends about this 'affair,'" Dacre went on. "If you have any respect for the character of your scullerymaid I should recommend you to do nothing of the kind. Hold your tongue, and I shall hold mine." He picked up his gloves and commenced to fit them to his fingers. "After all, I am rather obliged to you. You have done me a great service. You have given me the hand of Cyril's cousin, and saved me from a very considerable expense."

Seeing here a contraction about the other's lips, that made him think he was going to strike him, he drew back instinctively.

"I won't touch you," says Bland, contemptuously. "I am sorry that I did just now. Go away, and remember that, scoff as you may, there is a God who sees the hearts of such men as you are, and can punish as well as pardon."

Dacre stopped at the door, with the old wicked smile—so long the delight of unfledged cavalry cornets and rising young *attachés*—fluttering upon his lips.

"My dear Mr. Bland," he said, "is it possible that a man of your ability can *really* believe in such an exploded fallacy as that?"

And then, with an easy bow—defiant to the last—he shut the door and went out into the night.

Bland—his excitement departed—sinking, all trembling and unnerved, into a chair, shuddered at the hideous cynicism of the reply. It would have been a strange commentary upon *his* theory also, could he have seen, by any sort of second sight, the haggard figure that the Kirkminster down-express had just landed upon the edge of the roaring stream of London night-traffic, and that with fixed purpose—Fury driven—was coming up through wind and rain, driving furiously through the gaslit, gleaming streets, hard on the track.

CHAPTER LII.

NEMESIS.

CYRIL CHATTERIS was not a brave man; he was at heart a coward, and he knew it. He had known it for years past, ever since the day when a boy struck him at school, and his clenched hand refused to strike back again. But he had buried the hideous knowledge deep in his own heart, had put it away and covered it over with all the heaped-up vanities of his youth. At college, the *sang-froid* he had cultivated so anxiously, had become almost a second nature with him. He had gone through the usual course of quarrels; but his coolness had stood him in good stead, and his affectation of indifference and ready sarcasm had carried him through many a wordy war with credit, if not with honour. But though many hinted that "Chatteris, of Christ's," was not remarkable for pluck or courage; many more, admiring his ready wit and sharp tongue, decided that he was of the dainty, French Abbé type, and was too indifferent to danger even to seek it. A blessed civilization had almost induced the young man himself to believe in this view of the case, and it was only when the old barbaric passions of hate and revenge broke the educational dykes, and flooded his soul with their black and swollen tide, that he knew how miserably deficient he was in the physical courage which should belong to a mind like his.

Cyril was utterly wanting in moral fear. He could plan out his baseness and treachery with ease and calmness. His reasoning was perfect, his criminal logic hard and unanswerable; he could think out the destruction of another's hopes or the sudden wresting away of another's life, with smooth brow and pulse unquickened; but when the imaginative portion of his mind came into play, he shuddered with terror—the scene which in the pure, cold light of reason seemed so ordinary and natural, the lurid glare of his imagination filled with hideous shadows, and steeped in a misty and terrible gloom, behind which moved indistinct shapes of vengeance, horror, and death. At

the thought of putting his projects into practice, and acting the part he proposed for himself, these shifting and unstable phantoms of his brain rose up out of the depths of his coward heart and terrified him. There was something wanting, he thought, in his nature. He could have been a tyrant, remorseless and bloody. He could have heard the cries of the orphaned children of his victims without the quiver of an eyelid; but his blood would have chilled, and his hand refused to strike, had he been brought face to face with the doomed, despairing wretch, and bade plunge the knife into the bound throat himself. He had analysed his own feelings and motives, with that terrible power of analysis, which the unrestrained exercise of evil thought alone confers, and which becomes a very familiar, at once aiding to sin and goading to despair. When first the full knowledge of his love for his cousin and his hatred to his wife had come upon him, he had sat down in the pride of his intellect and vanity, to examine into causes, to argue with virtue, to dissect, in fine, his whole soul, and analyse the poison ere he drank it. But as each succeeding day of this self-examination showed him clearer and clearer how black his own heart had become; as each step into the awful boundary land that lies between reason and madness brought him nearer and nearer to a terrible abyss of blackest guilt, down which he feared even to think of looking, he found that his old faint scruples of honour and virtue had fled; that he grew each day more desperate, more despairing, at finding that his own soul was peopled with lurking shapes of infamy, crime, and guilt, ready to start into life at his bidding. How he had once longed to break from the power of the devil he had raised, and to go back again to such virtue as he had known before his marriage; but it was impossible, his self-torment drove him on until at last he found himself thrust to the very edge of that blackest abyss of murder, which is in the inmost soul of every one of us.

He had the courage that belongs to the worst form of cowardice; the savage recklessness which makes the hunted wolf turn upon the hounds he fears and rend them. His mind was put off its balance; the long months of

misery and suspense which he had undergone during the early months of his marriage; the terrible struggle between shame and hate which had so nearly prostrated him; the sudden shock of the discovery and ruthless tearing off of that mask of honour which he had so long worn; the bitter shame of defeat by such an adversary; the scorn and contempt of the only creature he had ever loved in the world; the downfall of all his hopes and expectations, and utter destruction of all he held most dear, had maddened him. In his savage agony of wounded vanity and baffled sin, he had but one thought—revenge, sudden, decisive, complete, upon the man to whom the world would point as his wronger. He had hated Dacre always; hated him for his ability, his influence among men, his coolness, so superior to his own, and his mastership in all that intellectual sin, which he imagined the world rated so highly. He hated him for the authority which he possessed over him; hated him for his discovery of the marriage; hated him for his ready acquiescence in his own horrible plot; and hated him because that plot had been successful. The vanity of his nature rose up even here. He detested his wife, but the thought that she loved another was madness. He had purposely flung her in Dacre's way, and studied, by all the means in his power, to make her yield to the temptation he offered her; and now she had yielded, he felt that he would have given the best years of his life to undo what he had done. But the pity was not for her, it was for himself. His remorse sprang, not from sorrow at the deed, but at shame of the knowledge of it.

Through the rain and steam, through the night, and through the fog, through the roar of the London streets, through the whole of his journey, jibes and laughter seemed ringing in his ears. He seemed to hear the muttered contempt, and see the looks of scorn which he knew would greet him. The last lustrous glance of Kate seemed to burn into his brain. He seemed to see his father's outstretched hand, and to hear his high voice again. His head was hot, and his temples throbbed; but his feet were as cold as ice. His hands were clammy with a cold sweat, and shook with nervous excitement.

His lips were parched and cracked. He could scarcely swallow. His heart leapt and fluttered and beat furiously; and he could not sit still for two minutes together. All sorts of wild visions tore through his bursting brain, like the wild hunt of German story. Visions the most incongruous. Reminiscences of the old playing fields at Eton, mixed with odds and ends of books that he had read. Strange stories of blood and lust and crime that made him shudder, and long-forgotten jokes, that made him laugh. The names on the shops suggested all sorts of grotesque ideas. The cries of the cabmen and omnibus drivers were distorted into weird and ominous sounds. The very letters of the railway company's monogram in his carriage seemed to have become twisted into a sentence of terrible meaning. He had fallen asleep for a few seconds during the journey, and had lived a hideous lifetime of torment in some dream, that made him wake in a cold sweat of mortal terror. But all these things were indistinct, a moving panorama behind one picture which never shifted.

Something—some name, or cry, or what not—had called to his mind a grim story of how one Madame Mazel had a servant named Le Brun, and how Le Brun had murdered the old woman one windy night, cutting her throat and cutting her hands, and stabbing her. There had been a picture in the book where he had read it,—a picture of a tumbled bed, with the bell-rope hung up high out of reach, and a man going out at the door looking back fearfully. This picture was before him wherever he turned. He could not dismiss it. No matter what wild fancies crowded on his brain, in the midst of them all, steady and immovable, rose the picture of the mangled woman and the tumbled bed with the bell-rope flung up out of reach; and against this silent terror the flying shadows of his thoughts broke and divided, like mists against a ghastly moon.

As he was borne onward through the night and rain, this horror began to freeze into a thought. He had started with purposes all undefined—with some idea, perhaps, of saving his wife and redeeming his honour. But in the whirlwind of his passion of hate and rage, he had begun to lose all thoughts of affection or of happiness. His

hopes had been blasted, his future hopelessly broken and blackened, he could never look the world in the face again, and all the emotions of his soul had merged into one savage greed of revenge upon his destroyer. He scarcely thought of his wife. She was to him now but a name; and the memory of all that had passed since that fatal marriage morning seemed as a story told to him of another, or at best, but as some dimly-remembered event which had happened to him years ago, and with which his present life had no concern whatever. His mind was attuned to one key, and was dumb to all chords but one—revenge. He felt that he must see Dacre, ~~must~~ meet him face to face, must speak to him, and tell him how he hated him. His nervous fingers itched to be at his enemy's throat; and yet when his mind pictured the struggle, the muttered curses, the blows and the blood, he shuddered and grew sick; and then ever out of his fear grew up the hideous picture.

But outwardly he was calm enough. He spoke quite quietly, and though his voice sounded strange in his own ears, it was steady and natural enough. He remembered afterwards, that of all the faces—porters, ticket-takers, passengers, cabmen—which he saw that night, he did not remember one. He moved and spoke as if in a dream,—a dream in which all life was a dream—the streets, the houses, the carriages, cabs, and people, all dream-begotten, that through this terrible city of phantoms he—dreaming also—was driven by some relentless power towards a solitary figure that had the outward appearance of Rupert Dacre, but was lying on a tumbled bed, with a bell-rope flung high up out of reach.

CHAPTER LIII.

CERTA FUNERA ET LUCTUS.

BLAND, sitting by the sinking fire some half-hour, thinking of the future fate of the poor girl upstairs, who, ignorant of the battle fought in her behalf, and conscious only of the blessed sense of safety, had sobbed herself to sleep in

her mother's arms, was aroused by a violent knocking. He opened the door himself, and started when he saw the figure of Cyril standing on the step, as though it had risen suddenly out of the black bleak night.

Cyril came into the hall.

"Bland!" he said, in a tone of surprise.

"All is safe!" cries Bland, prompted by some wild hope that Cyril might be innocent after all, and unconscious of his friend's villany.

Cyril, with eyes wandering from side to side, as if seeking for something, said, in an indifferent voice, "Where is Rupert Dacre?"

"Gone—thank God!" cries poor honest Bland.

Cyril passed his hand over his face. The tone was enough. He comprehended at once that by some chance Dacre had been stopped from carrying out his design—that he was not in the house—that he had escaped him.

"I want to see him," he said, with that affectation of a distinct utterance which belongs to a man conscious of partial intoxication. "Do you know where he is?"

Bland blushed with anger.

"To *see* him! Do you know why he came here to-night? Good God, can men have become such scoundrels!"

Cyril did not seem to understand what was meant.

"Can you tell me where Dacre is?" he asked again, with a sort of dim consciousness in his own mind that he must not say too much, or stop too long, lest some imperceptible difference in his speech or manner should betray the secret purpose he clutched close in his breast.

The sight of him, calm, quiet, with hat pulled down over his brows, and arms pendant and motionless, suggested to the simple Bland no suspicion. It seemed to him that the inquiry was made in the most friendly spirit, and his whole gorge rose against it.

"Your accomplice is gone," said he. "You had better follow him. Your wife—God help her!—is here, and where she is can be no fit place for you."

He flung open the door again, and pointed out into the dismal night.

Cyril, going out into the darkness without a word, seemed at that moment to see high up in the watery ray of light —

which the hall lamp of the house he turned his back on for ever, flung into the air before him—the figure of Le Brun with the knife in his hand—waiting.

At Oxford Street he dismissed the cab that had brought him from the station, and set out walking through the rain. It seemed to him that he would reach his destination quicker on foot; that the cab could not go fast enough, and that he must not shriek or shout to urge the driver to greater exertion. When he was by himself he could get on faster, and the exercise would tend to compose his mind. He was quite calm now. He seemed to be endowed with a sort of supernatural lucidity of intellect upon one point. As, by dint of constant staring at some bright object, the eye can recall its form and shape at will with startling distinctness, but can attentively examine nothing else before which the shadow of the form so imprinted in the brain does not fall and flicker; so, by dint of dwelling upon the one thought, Cyril had achieved a sort of abnormal power of grasping all its details, of tracing it through all its ramifications, of multiplying himself, so to speak, so that he could look at it at once from all its different points of vision; but that thought occupied his mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts, and the image which had suggested it grew out of his strained vision into as palpable a form as did the air-drawn dagger of the murderous Thane.

Fast over the wet and shining pavement he walked, and heeded not the sharp sleet and bursts of driving hail. The stream of human life passed on each side of him, and he heeded it not; for all he felt of human sympathy, he might have been the only human soul in all those roaring streets. He remembered afterwards some few events of that night. He remembered that he was asked for alms by a beggar crouching round the corner of some street; that, in turning, he had pushed her into the kennel, and that, with a sudden, bitter impatience of cold and wet, and starvation and hustling, she had cursed him. He remembered how he had stopped at one place—a hoarding, behind which some street repairs were going on—and reading some advertisement, in blue and white (he remembered the colours distinctly), about a clipper

ship to sail for Melbourne direct, on April the 15th, it had struck him dimly that the newspaper he had read that morning bore date of the 14th. He remembered wondering if he could purchase a passage sufficiently early on the morrow, and if he had enough money. Still moving, as it seemed to him, through a land of shadows, he went down to the Pegasus Club, and, hurrying into a writing-room, drew a cheque for fifty pounds, which he sent with a private note to the steward requesting cash, and for which a waiter brought him five crisp notes. Then, still moving through shadows, and hearing all voices indistinctly, he went out into the wet streets again, swiftly on to his destination.

With one pause. The hideous bed, with its bloody burden and tumbled sheets, was still present before him; and he thought, with a shudder, how Madame Mazel had clutched at the knife of the assassin in her death agony, and was found with hands hacked to the bone. He shuddered as he thought of the clean, dry steel sucking into the flesh of the old woman's fingers, and realised the savage struggle in the dark, the wild reaching for the flung-up bell rope, the quick, desperate stabbing at the soft, wrinkled throat, and the gasping cries, that were choked in blood and gore. Le Brun was a clumsy fellow; why did he not strike suddenly, and without notice? One blow would have ended all. And the terrible picture of the Murderer looking round affrightedly, with the knife in his hand, rose up distinct and clear before him.

He stopped at a cutler's shop in Holborn, and asked to see some pruning knives. The shop was bright and glittering. He remembered afterwards that a door opening into a room beyond, revealed the cutler's wife, well-dressed and smiling, sitting by the fire, and that the cutler's little daughter, rosy-cheeked and golden-haired, had been disturbed by his entry in a good-night kiss. He liked none of the knives; they were too crooked. A curved blade was not so convenient. He saw some straight ones, and out of them picked a stout, buck-handled weapon, with a spring at the back to prevent its closing on the fingers. The cutler—with glances towards the little rosy face waiting to be kissed—wrapped it up, with some

remark about the weather; but when Cyril got in the street he tore off the paper, and thrust his purchase into his breast. Looking up about this time, as he neared Brook Street, he saw, with some sort of terror, that all the lights were surrounded by a red ring, and that the wet pavement was the colour of blood.

The house was silent and dark. He rang and knocked quietly. After some delay, Harris appeared.

"Mr. Dacre in?"

Mr. Dacre *had* been in, but had gone out again. *Might*, perhaps, be back in an hour or so. It was now eleven o'clock. There was a letter come for him an hour ago from the 'Ouse. Any particular business? perhaps Mr. Chatteris would wait?

Mr. Chatteris, speaking in an automaton distinct way—Harris said afterwards that he thought he had been drinking—would wait; would go upstairs, he thought, and amuse himself with a book until Mr. Dacre returned. He knew the room—oh, yes—Harris could go to bed if he liked.

So Harris, who had got wet through in keeping his appointment with the milliner, conducted his master's friend to his master's room, put some more coal on the fire, placed the spirit case on the table, suggested that the water in the little bronze bull could be made hot in a moment by a hint of the spirit lamp, produced some of his master's best cigars, and, with a gentle cough, retired, nothing loth, to his couch.

When he had gone, Cyril sat silent and motionless. He was incapable of reasoning farther. He had arrived at the end of his journey at last. He had come with but one object, and, until that object was achieved, he could do nothing. He seemed to possess a dual existence; to have two minds as it were. The one told him that he was about to commit a crime, the punishment of which was death, that he could not escape, that by his visits to St. John's Wood, the club, the cutler's shop, he had established a train of evidence that would infallibly lead to his capture. But he felt powerless to resist. It was as though some power, stronger than his own reason, was urging him on, as if he was the instrument of some terrible avenging Fate that whipped him along the bloody track

of murder. From thinking upon the thing so long, it had driven him mad. He was mad for the time being; he knew it. His other mind, reasoning, reflecting, albeit dully and with difficulty, told him so. But he could not break the spell that was on him. His brain was burning. He seemed to feel it throb, not merely at his temples, but at the crown of his head. It seemed to be a sort of living creature, that leapt and gasped for breath and swelled itself as if it would burst his skull. His hands were hot now, and dry, and quivering with a sort of electric sensitiveness. His heart beat slowly, with great, sullen pulsations that throbbed to the very extremity of his body. His eyesight was failing him, and everything he looked at was crimson. Pushing aside a large official letter addressed to the man whom he had come to seek, he drew the knife from his breast, laid it down ready to his hand; then, sitting amid the books and pictures and statues, the official despatch-boxes, the pink notes of compliment, the thousand elegancies, luxuries, and marks of worldly glorification and honour, which made up the sum of that happiness, to secure which the astute man of the world had plotted and schemed so assiduously; sitting with the letter which would give to Dacre the intelligence he had long hoped to hear, lying side by side with the shining knife, he waited. Waited with his head sunk on his breast, with one hand clenched on his knee, and the other playing nervously with the coarse, cruel hilt of the knife. Waited, with all the events of the past rolling past him like some wild phantasmagoria, with a weight on his brain, and the red mist ever before his eyes.

He remembered afterwards how the shutters had been left half open, and one cold, sullen ray of struggling moonlight pointed in at him like a finger, and glittered on the bright blade of the murderous steel. Long afterwards, in the dismal grey shadow of gum-tree trunks; in the bleak night, when the cry of the plover rose and fell dismally over long reaches of barren scrub and black morass; in the glare and heat of noon, when the blazing sun beat down through the shadowless waste of the Australian forest, he remembered that room and that night. In the murky silence that reigned around the dull swinging

lamp of the outward-bound ship—labouring with creakings and groanings through the pitiless seas of the Cape—the ticking of that pretty clock-bauble would sound again in his ears and make him shudder. Amid the rough, delirious gaiety of the low dancing-halls and drinking-shops of the golden capital of the South, some casual sight or sound would bring back to him the luxurious splendour of that dainty chamber, and strike his brandy-heated blood cold with sudden terror. In the squalid misery of the “men’s hut” in some far away station, locked in ghastly reaches of mallee, or belted round with sandy deserts, grim and dangerous; sitting, perhaps, round the blazing wood-fire, while savage oath and hideous jest and mocking laugh went round; he would recall the appearance of that room as he had seen it last; would picture the soft curtains and the delicate colours, the gleaming statuettes, the rich books, all the wealth of *luxure* and splendour that belonged to that world from which he was for ever banished. But now he felt nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing. In the heart of that luxury, lapped in the soft glow of the fire, smiled at by the sweet faces of painter’s dreams, surrounded by all that could make life pleasurable, he waited with the horn handle of the murderous knife close to his hand.

At last, long past midnight, his quick ears heard the click of the opened latch. He noiselessly turned out the gas and, clutching the knife, drew himself up in the darkness ready to strike. In that awful interval, as he counted the ascending footsteps, he saw the hideous picture which had haunted him grow up again out of the darkness. The tumbled bed, the murderer with the knife, and over all, sharp, clear, distinct, close to his face, the flung-up bell rope dangling—like a noose.

* * * * *

Mr. Rupert Dacre had driven off to his club. Once there, in the shining light, and among the old familiar faces, the bitter rage and shame of his humiliation wore off. He had felt it though at first. It was as though some master of fence, prepared to take his stand against all comers, had been disarmed and defeated by some stripling on whose chin the beard had not yet grown. He felt, as some

brilliant wit of the *salons* might have felt, when an unknown provincial *abbé* or despised butt of the court had suddenly flashed out upon him with unanswerable sarcasm. He felt degraded in his own eyes, lowered in his own self-esteem. He had failed. With all the advantages of position and intellect, he had failed; he had been beaten in fair fight by a despised adversary, but this was all. There was no remorse for what he had done, no pity for the girl whom he had so nearly brought to shame, or the man whom his insidious plots and selfish scheming had urged to ruin. True to his creed, he cast away all thought of retribution, and, confident in himself, moved steadily onward towards his fate, whatever his fate might be. At the club, he found the old circle brimful of congratulation, ready with jest and compliment. The Chester Cup was all the theme, and Randon, who had expressly come down to give the most accurate information, was revelling in particulars.

"W-w-wonderful! B-b-b-bob's horse! T-t-t-t-tre-m-m-mendous odds! I kn-kn-knew it! I p-preep-pre-d-dicted it! I own, I fuf-fufwankly own, I *am* a judge of h-horse flesh," etc.

But over and above this Chester Cup, was the all absorbing topic of the Ministerial Crisis. The Nantwichian scheme had ripened into something like fruit at last. That night the blow was to be struck, and all well-informed London was on tiptoe of expectation. Moral Millington coming in, wrapped in a multitude of great coats, brought the first tidings. The Ministry had resigned! Dacre forgot all his losses. His creed was right, after all. Self-interest had carried the day. To-morrow his patron would be Prime Minister of England, and a glorious vision of place and power rose before him. What did he care now for Carry's love or Bland's threats? What did he care for the fulminations of the righteous? He had chosen that good worldly part, and defied the sentimentality of canting religionists who averred that it could be taken from him. So he sat, and smoked, and chatted, unconscious of the figure waiting in his silent house, listening to the ticking of the dainty pendule.

Late at night he rose, and, with a last jest on his lips,

rose to go. The smoking-room was laughing with well-bred delight at some last daring pleasantry—they got a little free in their jesting after midnight—as he nodded his good-night. As he closed the heavy door he heard Grossmith say, in whispered answer to some question of some *novus homo*, “The most rising man in England, sir,—will be Under-Secretary within a week, sir,—Nantwich’s right-hand man;”—and as he heard, the old cynical smile came back to his lips again.

All the way home he thought of nothing but of his future greatness. He had won, after all—despite the little crosses and drawbacks. To-morrow he would be at the summit of his hopes. Not a shadow of coming evil fell on him, as he gaily mounted the stairs to where the man he had wronged was waiting. He would see if there were any letters for him. Perhaps fame and fortune awaited him behind that stained inch of panelled deal! Striking a match, he opened the door. The first thing that caught his eye was the large letter on the table. He could distinguish the well-known character of his chief, even at that distance. His appointment, beyond doubt! He had won, after all; and here was the stake he had played for. He stepped into the room with hand outstretched, eager to grasp the prize. But ere his fingers could close upon it, a sudden, terrible instinct of a strange presence in the room seized him, and, without knowing why, he wheeled round to the door. At that instant—with a low, hoarse cry and knife upraised—the waiting assassin leapt out upon him, and as the expiring match dropped from his hand, its blue flickering flame showed him for one single second the white face and blood-shot eyes of Cyril Chatteris

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Mr. Harris, in the room above, awoke from some pleasant dream of a West End hotel, of which he was owner—awoke with a start, and in a cold sweat of deadliest terror. Something had happened, he knew not what. He had some memory of a cry and a crash as of an overturned table; but sitting up, listening aghast in the darkness, he heard nothing save the house-door bang

suddenly, and then remembering that Mr. Chatteris had waited for his master, he rolled the bed-clothes round him, with a muttered curse at his former fears, and went to sleep again.

CHAPTER LIV.

SMOKE.

ALL London rang with it. At first in the morning of the morrow it began to be whispered about in club-rooms; then various persons became possessed of particular and private information. Old Grosmith, who had spoken to him last, revelled in momentary fame, and went about mysteriously sighing. By and by evening papers came out with accounts more or less incorrect. The matter began to assume proportions, and take, as it were, a visible shape. The events of the past night took their place in history as "THE BROOK STREET TRAGEDY;" and all the little particulars of the life of the late unknown member for Kirkminster became familiar facts to thousands of people. The name of Dacre became a household word, for at least three weeks, all over England. Quiet people in remote country villages read, with curious interest, the description of the luxurious room; the handsome furniture, all scattered and bloody; the torn curtains, and the overturned table. The sensation newspaper-paragraphists were in high glee, and compared the thing to a romance in real life, adapted out of a modern novel, a leaf from a French *feuilleton*, an act of that "strange drama of vice and jealousy and crime, which is silently playing all around us"—and so on. Blister was particularly happy; and the *Morning Mercury* had a very titilliant leader, in which Edgar A. Poe, the murders in the Rue Morgue, and *l'affaire Clémenceau* came in with great effect.

Under the great tobacco-cloud, beneath which the endless flood of talk seethes and boils, speculation and comment ran furious.

"Young Calverly heard it first," says Welterwate. "The servant came up to Limmer's and told him. Jack Ponsonby was there, and they both went down."

"There was some row over that horse, wasn't there?" asked Berry.

"Dacre hadn't behaved very well, I believe; at least, so the fellows said in the train last night; but that's all over now, poor devil."

"They found a letter from Nantwich on the table," says Miniver, "giving him an under-secretaryship. He hadn't opened it."

"By Jove!" says little Fitz. "Life's a rum thing, you know. Just as a fellow's got all he wants, you know, by Jove, he gets murdered! It's awful, upon my soul!"

"I suppose there's no doubt but that Chatteris did it?"

"None in the world. The *Mercury's* got the whole thing traced out. But they won't catch him. He's got over to Paris, or some place, by this time. Why, he's got a good twelve hours' start!"

"It's an awful thing!" says Millington. "The fellow was here last night, sir, sitting in that very chair!"

"I can't understand it!" cries old Grosmith. "Damn it, sir, it couldn't have been about that Kirkminster business?"

Welter shook his head. Other rumours had got about that day—rumours of some reason stronger than disappointed pride, for the bloody crime. Rumour became certainty in a few days. At the inquest the whole hideous story came out. How Cyril Chatteris—the presumed murderer, for whom the police were hunting high and low, whose description was at all the shipping offices and police stations in the kingdom—had been secretly married to the daughter of his lodging-house keeper; how the dead man had intrigued with his friend's wife; how that intrigue was discovered; and how Cyril Chatteris had set off to London to redeem his honour; and how he had followed Dacre home and killed him.

"Justifiable homicide, begad, sir!" moral Millington had said when he had heard it; and the public seemed to agree with him.

But the fact of Cyril's engagement to his cousin being known, this view began to be disputed; and by and by it leaked out—in the mysterious way in which such things do leak out—that the dead man had been urged on to

seduce the wife, in order that the man who had murdered him might marry another woman.

The search after Cyril grew hotter and hotter, but all in vain. It seemed that when the door banged behind him on that gusty night, it had shut him out from the world for ever; that the darkness had swallowed him up; that the night had hidden him as securely as the cold earth and the pompous grave-stone had hidden the body of his victim.

By and by the chase grew colder, and the story began to fade from men's minds. Another fortunate gentleman obtained the patronage of Nantwich, and matters went on much as usual. But it was strange to see how the sudden death of Dacre had brought toppling down to the ground all that edifice of worldly honour which had been erected with such care. It was as though the keystone of an arch had been suddenly knocked away, and the whole fabric brought to instant ruin.

The whole wretched story of folly and baseness which I have told in these pages became at once known to the world. The little drama that had been played out so quietly between London and Loamshire was familiar to everybody. It was no longer a story of three private lives,—a social secret, or mystery, to be hinted and nodded at. It was a Fact, a Crime, a thing to be writ down and recorded for a precedent. By Dacre's sudden death, the whole social economy of six lives was changed in an instant.

Mrs. Manton, once so fond and proud of her daughter, hiding with her in a remote suburb of London under a feigned name, and visited only by Bland and poor honest Binns;—Sir John Ellesmere, the rich baronet, cursing hard fate that brought him into connection with a family so notorious, whimpering and whining at his poor pretty wife for her relationship to a man whose name had been the sport of vulgar tongues;—Old Saville Chatteris, broken-down and querulous (refusing to hear his son's name mentioned, or to recognise his son's wife by word or deed), shut up in gloomy Matcham—upon which some weird shadow of Cyril's guilt seemed to have fallen—seeing no one but young Squire Calverly, who was going back to Australia soon, and who came sometimes to Matcham,

and would try to comfort him in his honest way;—Old Chatteris, who seemed, as he grew day by day nearer to his end, to awake to the consciousness of the false standard of greatness he had set up for himself, and to begin to value honesty and goodness and virtue above rank and birth,—for he grew very fond of Bob, and would potter about the grounds, leaning on the young man's stalwart arm, as though he looked upon him almost as another son;—Kate, too, on the other side of her uncle, would often look up with a pleased smile at Bob's frank face, and in Bob's honest heart there arose a hope—which he scarcely dared breathe even to himself as yet. Upon all these the weight of crime and sin fell heavily enough; but the world without—the wicked world, for whose sake the dead man had toiled and plotted, in whose grim service he had died—thought but little of the matter.

It was but two the less in that pleasant masquerade. Plunge your finger twice into the ocean, and you will see the place they filled.

While the excitement was at its height,—while the papers teemed with paragraphs and letters,—while surmise ran mad, and all the hideous details of the two lives, that had just been blotted out, were familiar to men's lips,—there was a certain supper party, at which the "world" was present.

"I hear that it is suspected he's got away to Australia!" said Leamington.

"I will lay fifty to one that they catch him!" offered Welter.

"What do they do with them here!" asked Aglaë, who affected to be profoundly ignorant of English customs.

"Hang 'em, my dear!" says Quantox, with a chuckle.

"Oh! Bon! I shall go and see him then!"

"Dear me!" put in a sleek Jew, by name Knippstein, who founded his claim to recognition in society upon the fact of his "protecting" a Christian ballet-dancer, "I thought the late lamented Rupert was a friend of yours!"

"*Tais-toi, Monsieur, qui paye!*" says the girl, in an atrocious Belgian *pâtois*. "*Je suis mère de famille Anglaise —Madame Breeeegs!*"

The Jew grew angry, but was afraid that Brentwood

would laugh if he said anything, and so contented himself by thinking of a man who owed him money, and determined to write to his solicitors to press the case.

"I hope the fellow will get away," says good-natured Hethrington. "I didn't dislike him, and he had a brother in 'ours.'"

"He was a bad-tempered beggar!" said Fleem.

"Thought himself witty!" said Hurst.

"I believe the fellow was a little cracked!" said a crotchety M.P. who had a scheme for abolishing the Irish Church by destroying the Dogger Bank, and thus spoiling the supply of fish on Fridays.

"Yes, I think the poor devil must have been mad!" says Pierrepont.

"Not he! Bad blood, sir; bad blood!"

"The other man was worse!"

"*Arcades ambo!*"

"Well, he has got his good 'deliverance' now, at all events!"

"*Nous ferons des crêpes!*" says the Belgian, pulling her poodle's ears.

"Well," said Gablentz, with his heavy German accent, "we don't miss either of 'em much."

"The game of life is too exciting for an empty chair to be long unfilled. Eh, Gablentz?" says Hurst.

Gablentz smiled at an illustration so exactly after his own heart.

"Quite so."

"Well, lul-l-look here!" cries Randon, in a sudden burst of frankness. "I fuf-fuf-fwankly own that there w-w-as s-s-something abub-bub-bout 'em bub-both that I never could gug-get over. My soul s-s-sympathises with the T-t-twue! I own, I fuf-fwankly own, I never liked 'em!"

"Noble sentiment!" says Brentwood; "but Mademoiselle's best pearl powder has come off on your coat sleeve."

There was a roar of laughter.

"Hang it!" says Quantox, "let's talk of something else; I'm sick of these two fellows."

CHAPTER LV.

FIVE YEARS AFTER.

BALLARA PLAINS is, as all the world knows, purchased land most of it, and very pretty property. Since the passing of the Land Bill of 18—, squatting property in Victoria has depreciated, and the wiseacres who laughed at old Calverly's son investing his fortune in buying up his station from the Government were forced to confess that his bargain had turned out well for himself.

Two hundred thousand acres "purchased land!" The amount made new-comers open their eyes; made even travelling nobility "seeing the colonies" stare a little aghast. It was certainly a very fine property. So thought Mac Ossian, of Glen Ossian. So thought Tommy Lincoln—whilome shepherd, now Shepherd King, and owner of Lincoln's Hurst, a huge stone house, with furniture sent out from England, and tessellated floors, and a snug little room in one corner for Tommy to smoke his pipe and drink his battleaxe-brand in comfort. So thought the Daltons, lords of the Wimmera and rulers over many a mile of scrub, and heath, and rolling pasture-land. So thought the Maxwells, kings of the westward, whose broad acres spread out, fertile and fair, from Mount Sturgeon to the new Kentish Weald that lies round Lake Bur-rumbeet. Whim and Shafto, the mining monarchs of golden Ballarat, envied Bob Calverly, and would have given some considerable portion of their shares in reef and mine, to hold the position which fortune accorded to the son of old Calverly of Sydney. Even Mr. Drury, owner of four theatres, proprietor of half Collins Street and nearly all Bourke Street, the great Drury, whose name withheld or given could float or sink a "company," acknowledged that the tall, sunburnt young man was greater than he.

He had settled down now. The story of his Turf success had run from mouth to mouth in Sydney and Melbourne—as it had done in London—and had furnished much material for moralising. His friends had heard of him

occasionally from some returned Australian, who had met him at Rome, or Paris, or Naples. He was spending his money fast, people said. Living hard, going the pace, and so on. But he had done with it now. He had settled down. Settled down with his English wife, in his native country, and had set to work to do good in his generation.

"Why don't you go home, Bob?" Australian circles had said. "If I was in your place, I wouldn't live anywhere out of Europe."

"Well, I think a man ought to look after his property himself," the other would say. "Besides, my wife doesn't like England."

And the questioner, who had heard, like all others, some version, more or less correct, of the crime which had blighted four lives, confessed that the reason was a sufficient one.

But the story was dying out from men's minds now. It had been the topic of a week, the wonder of a year; but, as the days rolled on and no fresh circumstance arose to recall the memory of the deed, it began to fade from men's minds—began even to lose its power over the immediate spectators of the tragedy.

Poor old Saville slept beneath his heavy grave-stone in Matcham churchyard, and his pride slept with him. Lady Loughborough was in Paris; and Mr. Horace Chatteris, of the Austrian legation—a lean man, with a consumptive wife and three hectic daughters—reigned at Matcham. Bob had put his fortune to the test in Lady Loughborough's house in Bryanstone Square on his return from Norway, and had won it. He knew that the sad memory of the guilty man weighed sometimes on his wife's heart, but, strong in his own love, he hoped that other scenes and a new life, would weaken its influence; but he was never fully satisfied until one day.

Coming home one evening, riding slowly through the timbered levels that surrounded the long low house, with its broad verandah, and clustering grapes, he saw four men carrying something on their shoulders. They had already reached the back porch, and set down their burden reverently.

Spurring his horse, he topped the hill, and reined up beside the group.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A swagman, sir," said one of the men. "Harry found him in the flat by the creek, and we brought him up to the house, sir. He seems nigh dead."

The man was slightly made, bearded, and dirty. He was in the last stage of exhaustion, and lay back on the hurdle where they had placed him, motionless.

"Harry thinks he's mad, sir," said the man, as Bob dismounted. "He's been wandering about in the bush, I expect."

Tender-hearted Kate, to whom the news of the strange accident had been borne, came out hastily, with her three-years-old child clinging to her dress.

At the sound of her voice the miserable creature on the hurdle raised his tousled head suddenly, and with the motion his hat fell off. Kate gave a cry, and then slowly into the white face rose a crimson flush, and the wild eyes softened. Bob drew back in sudden terror. It seemed to him that the face before him was changing into another face—into a face that he had known well in old days—a face that had been effeminate and handsome, and admired. A name was on his lips; he would have spoken it in his sudden terror, but in another instant the light in the eyes had died out—the momentary glory that some gleam of returning reason, or memory of lost love, had caused to shine from those haggard features, paled, and the eyes set into a look of horror, as though at some hideous picture which had suddenly presented itself to the wretch's vision; and then, with a quick, upward motion of the hand, as if to ward off a blow, the ragged figure fell back upon the hurdle, and was in an instant nothing more than the sordid corpse of some nameless swagman.

Bob turned to his wife. The child, frightened by the sudden fall of the body, had run to his mother and buried his face in the folds of her white dress. At his first cry, without a look at the hideous thing that had once been the man she loved, Kate caught the boy in her arms, as if to shield him from contamination.

"You know him, darling?" asked Bob, in a low tone.

She shuddered in bending over the child that lay in her arms.

And as she raised her fair head from that pure kiss, the evening sun, which cast her shadow on the dead man, seemed to shed a glory on her face.

* * * * *

“But what of Binns and Bland? What of Carry?”

There is a little figure that is known well in sick rooms, in hospital wards, in prison cells. A quiet, slight figure, with soft brown hair, and large brown eyes. She is very tender, and very gentle. They call her “Sister Caroline.”

Binns and Bland? what can I tell you more about them? Shall I tinker at the unfinished window in Aladdin’s tower, and strive to picture what might have been? Looking forward into the future, I might affect to see many things, —might tell you how virtue triumphed, and love was rewarded, in the good old storybook fashion; how, after lapse of years, poor Binns reaped the reward of his constancy and plebeian valour; how he did finally make for himself name and place, though not of the poetical sort he had longed for; and how poor old Bland, sitting by the cheerful fireside, with his friend’s youngest child upon his knee, would see, in the growing happiness of his friend’s useful though humble life, some sort of recompense for his own wasted youth and lonely middle age; might, perhaps, sometimes fancy that he discovered, somewhere in the clouds of his trusty meerschaum, the events of the past shaping themselves dimly into some sort of pictured allegory, showing how intellectual sin, though supported by all the advantages of rank and station and worldly honour, is not always first in the race against simple faith, and honesty, and truth; how each act, each word, has an effect either for good or ill upon our future, and will bring forth its own punishment or its own reward. All this and more I might affect to know, and from it point the moral which no good book should lack; but I like not to linger on the stage, a tiresome chorus, now that the actors have retired.

Poor Binns! Poor Bland!

But every man has a romance once in his life, and the story I have so lamely told you is theirs.

END.

